U.S. Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
Region Five History Project

Interview with:	**Al Groncki**
Interview by:	**Susana Luzier**
Location:	**Yreka, California**
Date:	**October 15, 2004**
Corrected by:	**Al Groncki / Susana Luzier**

LUZIER: This interview is taking place in Yreka, California. Today's date is October 15th, 2004. We're in the lovely home of Al and Helen Groncki, G-r-o-n-c-k-i. My name is Susana, S-u-s-a-n-a L-u-z-i-e-r, Luzier, and I will be conducting the interview. I would like to begin by asking when and where you were born, and where you grew up.

GRONCKI: Yes. Rockford, Illinois, 1924, Christmas Eve, December 24th.

LUZIER: Wow**!**

GRONCKI: I grew up there through my seventeenth year, anyway, before I went away to college. I returned for a brief period, about a year and a half, after I graduated. But the rest — most of the time has been in California.

LUZIER: What did you major in in school?

GRONCKI: Well, first I started out in engineering, and first aeronautical engineering. I found out that was a mistake, and I went into chemical engineering for three years. I was in the Navy program, a V-12 Program at the University of Michigan when I found out there was such a thing as a forestry school. Once I found that out, there were just no other question, I knew what I wanted to be. At that time, I just didn't realize you could be a forester and make a living at it. [laughter]

And I tried — I was in this Navy unit, so I wanted to transfer from engineering to forestry. And they let me do it, momentarily. I think I was in forestry school for one week, and

then the lieutenant in charge of education called me in and said, "Sorry, I have to tell you the Navy needs more engineers. We're going to have to put you back in engineering school." [laughs] So they did. But as soon as I got out of the Navy, why, I immediately went back to Michigan and got in forestry school.

LUZIER: Where was that?

GRONCKI: Ann Arbor, Michigan. Yeah, there are three forestry schools in the state of Michigan. There's Michigan State University, which is at Lansing — a great rivalry between the two schools, the University of Michigan -- and then Michigan Technological Institute, I think it's called, up at Houghton, Michigan. They have a good forestry school up there.

LUZIER: Now, tell us about your family, how many children you have, and when and where you met your wife, and how long you've been married.

GRONCKI: We got married in 1960. I met my wife in southern California. I had been on the Lake Arrowhead District of the San Bernardino when I met her. So then I got transferred up here, and of course, we corresponded and whatnot. She came up for a visit. So we got married in 1960. She's Canadian, and was a Canadian citizen at that time. But she was going to Orange Coast College, studying nursing, and that's when we met. So we got married in '60.

We had a daughter in '62, Denise, who is living in Davis, California, now. And we adopted a son, Danny. Let's see, he was born in '66. He was two and a half years old when we got him. At that time, I was in Chicago working for the Job Corps Program, the Office of Economic Opportunity. So that's the family. Denise is in with U.C. Davis, the university there, doing graphic artist work. And Danny is in Eureka, California. He has a hair salon. We just spent a few days hunting together on my old district, the Salmon River District.

LUZIER: Oh, that's interesting. Well, that's wonderful. What kind of summer jobs did you hold?

GRONCKI: I only had one summer job in forestry. That was on the Shoshone National Forest in Wyoming. I know I felt flattered because the ranger would introduce me as his assistant ranger, and actually I was just a summer employee, hired more or less to chase smoke.

It was beautiful country. When I first got my appointment I was hoping to go back to Wyoming. But they were dirt poor in those days**;** they weren't cutting much timber. And of course, I had no knowledge about what California was like. I got an appointment on the Six Rivers, and that was an eye opener. [laughs]

LUZIER: But that qualified you for your lifelong dream — I mean, it started qualifying you?

GRONCKI: Oh, yes. Yes, the summer job. Yes.

LUZIER: What made you decide to pursue a career with the Forest Service, and what was your first assignment?

GRONCKI: Well, as I mentioned, you know, as soon as I found out there was such a thing as a forestry school, my decision was made instantly, and I never had any doubts about pursuing it. Because I had three years of engineering already, when I first started in forestry school, I went into wood technology. I got a masters degree in wood technology, and then later worked for a year and a half — I worked in Chicago for the National Door Manufacturers Association. And I worked for the Wyman Brothers Furniture Company in Rockford, Illinois, for about a year.

But I found out I wasn't able to get the fieldwork that I really wanted. So I thought, well, one way to get that field experience would be to go back to school and get a Ph.D. in wood technology. I was going to work in something that probably would have been a good field. I wanted to work in the anatomy of tropical woods. And tropical woods are a big thing now, so it would have been a very useful thing. But I had difficulty with my advisor, and he said, "Well, if you want to work on wood anatomy, go to Yale." He said, "I can't handle it here." So I decided — I said, "Well, what I really am after is field work, so I won't kid myself, I'll just get a degree in forestry," which I did. So I got a second masters degree in forestry, and got an appointment on the Six Rivers Forest.

LUZIER: What year was that?

GRONCKI: That was 1951. I arrived on the Six Rivers Memorial Day, 1951, and went to work the following day. Wes Hotelling was the ranger, and he was one of the old time rangers that

made it up the line. He hadn't been to forestry school, but he was a great manager. He was really, really a great manager.

LUZIER: That's great. Please give us a rundown of when and where you worked on many of the national forests in Region Five. You just mentioned that you worked on Six Rivers in 1951.

GRONCKI: **Yes**, I mentioned Six Rivers. And from the Six Rivers I went to the Klamath. I went from Orleans — well, first I started on the Lower Trinity District of the Six Rivers. I was called back, then, into the Navy, for the Korean War. I was gone two years in Korea as an assistant gunnery officer on a destroyer. When I came back, they sent me to Orleans, where I worked for Charlie Yates as district ranger.

Then I was only there three or four months and they shipped me up to Happy Camp, because the Happy Camp timberwork was just exploding. Sam Hall was the timber management assistant, and Ralph Clauwitter was there in charge of timber preparation. Then I was helping Ralph. Ralph shortly left to go into research, and then they made me in charge of timber sale preparation.

And when John Murray came from Chicago, Purdue University — John had an interesting career, and then later he ended up in Australia. There's two John Murrays, now. There's John R. Murray and John H. Murray. This is John R. Murray. But he was also there at Happy Camp.

Hank Scheer was the district ranger. An interesting little story: Most rangers at that time were nines, but Happy Camp had a pretty heavy workload. We were cutting seventy million board feet of timber a year. There were four professional foresters — handling a job of seventy million board feet a year. And we lost one of those [laughs] when Ralph went to research, then there were only three of us.

I talk to some of the young foresters today, and they say "Three of you handling, preparing and administering a cut of seventy million?" They couldn't believe it. But we did it.

LUZIER: And what year are you talking about now?

GRONCKI: We're talking about '54, '55, '56. Hank Scheer, I was going to tell you [laughs] that he had a young son — I forget his name right now. But Hank had just made GS-11 ranger, which, man, there was only one eleven ranger on the Klamath at that time. And his little boy ran out — we were having a get-together in the compound there in the morning where we usually gathered and talked a little bit. And his little boy ran out and said, "My dad is a Jesus eleven! My dad is a Jesus eleven! [laughter]

LUZIER: Oh, that's funny.

GRONCKI: Yeah.

LUZIER: Now, were you district ranger at that time?

GRONCKI: No, no. I was in charge of timber sale preparation. **Yes**, Sam Hall was the timber management assistant. When Sam left they promoted me to timber management assistant. Then they transferred me from there to the Inyo Forest as assistant ranger. And Dick Wilson was the ranger. This would be 1956, right after the big '55 fires. Dick Wilson went from there to Alaska — back to Alaska. He'd been to Alaska and he loved Alaska. And he made forest supervisor in Alaska. Joe Radel was the forest supervisor at that time on the Inyo.

Then they transferred me as assistant ranger from the Inyo to the San Bernardino National Forest on Lake Arrowhead District, where I worked for Tom Neff. Sim Jarvey was the supervisor. Charlie Yates was the fire control officer.

Well, then Sim Jarvey left, and Don Bauer took over as supervisor. I remember Don calling me and asking me if I would accept the ranger's job on the Salmon River District of the Klamath, and I almost jumped out of my shoes at the opportunity, because I loved the Klamath. And that's why we're living here today. So that was 1958.

LUZIER: How do you think the ranger's job differs from that of a ranger today? Do you have any ideas?

GRONCKI: Well, I could see a slow change coming about. There used to be a provision in the manual that said a ranger was supposed to spend eighty percent of his time in the field during the field season. I still have a letter in my file from Charlie Yates congratulating me, because of eight rangers on the Klamath — this would be in the early '50s, '58, '59 — I was the only ranger

that met that provision. I thought the rest of them were rather silly not to. But I could tell that that was early in my term there as ranger on the Salmon River District. As I was finishing, I found it more difficult to meet that provision, and I was down to about three field days a week. It took — in other words, from one day in the office to two days a week in the office. And nowadays they're just spending almost all their time in the office because of environmental impact statements and all of the increased paperwork.

I remember Reuben Sullivan was ranger at Happy Camp, and **he** could see his paperwork load increasing. At one of the rangers' meetings in the supervisor's office, Reuben rather facetiously said, "I need two assistant rangers. I need one just to go to meetings. Then I need another one to do the work that I can delegate to so I can get out in the field and see what's going on."

LUZIER: Yes, exactly.

GRONCKI: So that was just an indication of the way the job was changing.

LUZIER: Yes. What year were you transferred to the regional office in San Francisco?

GRONCKI: Well, there's a big detour in here. I went from the Salmon River District to the director of the Job Corps. Center on the Mendocino, Alder Springs Job Corps. Center.

LUZIER: Oh, I used to live there when I was a little girl!

GRONCKI: Is that right?

LUZIER: My father worked there, yes.

GRONCKI: Yes, Alder Springs.

LUZIER: Ah, it's beautiful there. When was that?

GRONCKI: That was 1965.

LUZIER: Oh, we lived there earlier.

GRONCKI: Yes. And in 1966, I got an offer from the Office of Economic Opportunity. The center directors in the Job Corps centers had two bosses. They had a field supervisor from the OEO, and then they had the forest supervisor.

And just an interesting aside: I had to go to Washington DC with another fellow, Hal Sebring. But we were interviewed by Sgt. Shriver, because Sgt. Shriver, when the Job Corps Program was first starting, wanted to staff the center directors jobs with political appointees, and he wanted them to be GS-15s. And they told him, they said, "Well, they can't be fifteens, because most supervisors are only thirteens. So they're going to have to be twelves. "Well," he said, "I want to look at these guys. I just don't know who they are, and I want to satisfy myself that they can handle the job."

So we went in. We waited a whole week in Washington just to try to get to see him because he was very busy. And finally they scheduled us to see him one afternoon, and we sat from about 3 o'clock in the afternoon until about 7 in the evening until we finally were ushered in to see him. And he had a regular apartment there. He had just taken a shower, and he was completing getting dressed for another meeting he was going to while he interviewed me.

But he really had a very poor understanding of what the ranger's job was. He thought — like we talked about skiing. He said, "Oh, I imagine you ski on government time." And I said, "No, no, no. I don't ski on government time." I said, "Normally, the ranger's job is one from early in the morning until late in the night. If I'm in the mountains on a pack trip, I'll be up at sunrise, and you're busy working with stock and looking at trails and phone lines, and things like that until almost midnight — until it's dark anyway." But he apparently was satisfied with the people he interviewed. He only interviewed five or six of us, and then he didn't want to see any more of us. He agreed that we could handle the job of running these — center directors jobs.

But they offered me a job as one of these field supervisors. And at first I turned it down because there was no re-entry agreement back to the Forest Service and I didn't want to get stranded over with the Office of Economic Opportunity. So they finally developed a cooperative agreement between OEO and the Forest Service, where we could take some of these jobs — and I know the chief encouraged us to do so, because he said, "The quality of the field supervisors was wanting."

LUZIER: Do you remember who the chief was at that time?

GRONCKI: I do know. I can picture him right now. Cliff, it was Chief Cliff at that time. So he encouraged us, several of us in the Forest Service to take these jobs.

LUZIER: Ed Cliff.

GRONCKI: So then I went — my headquarters were on the supervisor's office on the Nicolet National Forest in Wisconsin. And Archie —Phil Archibald — was the forest supervisor there. They were very cooperative and treated me like a member of the forest. They gave me clerical help for my job, and whatnot. I had four centers — all of my centers were Forest Service centers. I had one at Clam Lake**,** Wisconsin, and Steve Yurich was the forest supervisor, later a regional forester in Alaska and Milwaukee. Then I had one on the Iron Mountain National Forest, and one on the Cadillac — out of Cadillac, Huron**-**Manistee National Forest, I think it is, National Forest, and then one right out of Rhinelander there, the Blackwell Job Corps Center, where John Pager was the center director, and later became a staff person in Region Nine handling environmental education.

LUZIER: And this was about year what?

GRONCKI: This would have been '68, 1968 — '67, '68.

LUZIER: Big responsibility. Okay . . .

GRONCKI: Well, one of the reasons I went in the Job Corps Program is I had seen all of the good work that the Civilian Conservation Corps had done on the districts, building roads and campgrounds and that sort of thing. And we were having difficulty getting money for new campgrounds. So I thought, "Wow, this is a great program," you know. And when they offered me a chance to be part of it, why, I took it.

And they did, the Job Corps people did a lot of good work. The final way we worked it out, the Job Corps enrollees went to school one week and then they worked one week. And while they were working, they built tables and actually constructed some campgrounds. But they did a lot of good conservation work for the Forest Service.

LUZIER: So that's mainly what the Job Corps assignments are?

GRONCKI: Well, yes. Yes, they did a lot of good conservation work, all kinds, you know.

LUZIER: And how long did you work for them?

GRONCKI: I was with OEO for three years. After I was field supervisor of these four Forest Service camps, they offered me a job as a project manager of a large 1,200-man center. It was run by RCA, Radio Corporation of America.

LUZIER: What was the first word? Radio?

GRONCKI: RCA, Radio Corporation of America.

LUZIER: Radio. Go ahead. I just wanted to ask the ages of the kids involved in the YCC program and how they were recruited.

GRONCKI: Yeah, they were sixteen to twenty-one. They are supposed to be high school dropouts. They were not supposed to be in the juvenile detention or anything like that. However, we ran into a lot of them that we found out had been. And some of the local offices took that way, and really, it wasn't that objectionable. I remember we got one hardcore boy that had been in prison, actually. He was institutionalized already. We couldn't handle him; we had to release him. But most of them were just good kids that had, mostly for economic reasons had to drop out of high school. It was a marvelous program. We had many boys that — went from reading level maybe two or three, and in just six months or so they'd be at reading level eight or nine, and just fantastic success stories.

LUZIER: Boosted them up to have somebody care about them.

GRONCKI: The most remarkable success story I ran into, and it wasn't so much, really, that we had anything to do with it. But we got this boy, and the fellow that did all the testing for the — Camp McCoy Center where we had 1,200 boys — came running into my office. "We've got this boy, he's testing 90 percentile level on the Stanford Achievement Tests, the top of the Stanford Achievement, you know, ninety-nine, ninety-eight percent of all these tests, hundreds on some of them.

So I got him into my office and tried to find out, you know. He looked, what I call, a Jack Armstrong, the all-American boy, just handsome and smart. What happened, he was an orphan almost from birth. And his Uncle took him over, and his Uncle's wife had died, and the

Uncle was a traveling salesman. So he said, "What am I going to do with this young boy?" So what he did — and the uncle had been a teacher. So he taught him to read and whatnot. He would dump him off in the library at the beginning of the workday, and he'd say, "Okay" — he'd give him a reading list, things to read and all that. And he said, "You stay here." And that was his schoolroom, the library. Then he'd pick him up at 5:00. The kid grew up in libraries, and was self-educated — well, with the help of his uncle.

He and his uncle had a falling out, and here he was eighteen years old, didn't know what to do. He heard about the Job Corps Program, and he got into it. And the remarkable thing was that he got along **so** well. We were about fifty-percent blacks, and there was always some rivalry between the blacks and the whites. And this kid got along so well. I asked him, I said, "How do you do that?" He said, "Well, as soon as I got on the bus coming in from Milwaukee, I sized up the situation, and I could see that the blacks were pretty much in charge of what was going on in that bus. So I zeroed in on one of the leaders and asked him if I could sit next to him. Then I asked him if I could be his roommate." And he was welcomed with open arms and he became a part of the black leadership in that center, and he was just one of them.

He eventually — we had a special program in Washington DC with Georgetown University, and he ended up going to Georgetown University—

LUZIER: Smart kid.

GRONCKI: — with the goal of becoming a doctor, and I'm sure he did.

LUZIER: So what did you do after you did this?

GRONCKI: Well, after I was at Camp McCoy, I went into the regional office in Chicago, of OEO, where I was chief of training for all the centers in the Great Lakes Region, which were Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana**,** [now a comma before and unless publishing a book] and Ohio. We had, I think, twenty-five Job Corps centers, and I was chief of training for those centers.

LUZIER: And what was the year now?

GRONCKI: That was ’68 and ’69. And then in ’69, I came back to the Forest Service, at the regional office in San Francisco.

LUZIER: What became of the Job Corps Program?

GRONCKI: It still exists.

LUZIER: But not to the extent that it did?

GRONCKI: President Nixon closed, I would say, seventy-five percent of the conservation centers. But he left a few of them open. It was strictly a political decision, and that’s all I’ll say about that.

LUZIER: We have one in Shasta Lake.

GRONCKI: Do they? Then they opened a number of others, but most of the others that were opened were not conservation centers, they were — I don’t know what they call them there, they’re sort of urban centers, where kids can live at home, and then they go to school, have on-the-job training and that sort of thing. But yes, Job Corps is still — it’s in the Department of Labor now, and all the old courses done away with.

LUZIER: So you went into the RO, and that was in 1969?

GRONCKI: ’69.

LUZIER: What part of the RO did you go to?

GRONCKI: State and Private Forestry, the cooperative forestry program. I was in charge of general forestry assistance. It was quite an intriguing job, actually, where I worked with the University of California at Berkeley, the one at Davis. I worked, of course, with CDF, and spent a lot of time, and got to make some very good friends with the California Department of Forestry. Then I worked with a lot of private people, too.

LUZIER: Who were some of your coworkers during this particular period?

GRONCKI: You mean in San Francisco?

LUZIER: Yes.

GRONCKI: Bob Gustafson.

LUZIER: Oh, really?

GRONCKI: Yes.

LUZIER: We interviewed him. Yes.

GRONCKI: Yes, John Beebee was the director — or at that time, ARF, Assistant Regional Forester of State and Private Forestry. Jack Deinema was the regional forester. I had first worked with Jack in the Job Corps Program. I had a detail in Washington at one time helping Jack after the big '64 floods. Why, they had a program where they used Job Corpsmen to go to work — this was before the program really got started. But yes, we wanted to kick that off, and so I worked with Jack on getting that started. Then also, my coworker, Carl Hawks, was in Cooperative Force Management. Bob McDonald was Cooperative Fire Control. Then I had an assistant working on rural area development named Stanley Lynch. Stanley left shortly after I was there.

Then Jessie Kingsbury came on as my assistant. This was a fortuitous reunion, because Jesse had been my chief teacher at Alder Springs when I was center director there**.**Then Harvey Smith was in Forest Products Utilization. Then when Harvey retired, they found out that I had this master's degree in wood technology, and so they put that on me also. So I was in charge of Forest Products Utilization, as well as general forestry assistance. Then I also had Manpower programs, and met with a lot of other agency people on Manpower programs in the state. That was later transferred over as a separate job to Jack Weddle, and he worked in Administrative Management and had Manpower programs.

LUZIER: So you didn't just have a desk job.

GRONCKI: No, I was in the field, roughly, about fifty-percent of the time. When I say "field," I don't mean woods, because we very seldom got in the woods anymore, but it was out dealing with Forest Service people, and state and private people.

One of the highlight programs that I really enjoyed and I thought that did an awful lot of good was a program that came out of the Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin, and that was the Sawmill Improvement Program. We were able to do efficiency studies at these

sawmills and show them where they could improve to get more boards out of a given number of logs. We increased the efficiency of some of these mills by as much as fifty-percent.

LUZIER: Wow**!**

GRONCKI: But it was not difficult to get 10 to 20 percent improvement in sawmill efficiency. So what we claimed that we were doing is we were creating instant trees. In other words, we didn't have to plant trees and wait 100 years for them to grow up. By satisfying the existing demand for boards, getting that demand out of a fewer number of trees, we were leaving more trees standing in the forest.

LUZIER: That's wonderful.

GRONCKI: It was a great program. It was all computerized, of course, and it's gotten even more so. The sawmills, of course, have gotten more technically advanced, and they're using laser beams and all kinds of devices now to increase the utilization.

LUZIER: Why in the world haven't we heard about this? I've never heard about this. That's wonderful.

GRONCKI: Yes, it was a great program. Then to go along with it, we had a felling and bucking program and we turned this over to the state.

GRONCKI: Okay. Let's go. So we turned over that felling and bucking program to CDF, and they did a real good job with it. I remember attending one of the studies on — just here in northern California out of Anderson with one of the larger companies.

LUZIER: U.S. Plywood?

GRONCKI: No. Kimberly Clark. And we found out they were losing as much as 17 percent of their production on the ground from mismanagement in the felling and bucking operation — breakage, high stumps, mis-cut logs. So that was also a very good program.

I got to work with the utilization specialists in all of the different regions. It was a remarkable group of people, really very dedicated and very knowledgeable in forest products utilization. It was really an enjoyable experience for me to get back into utilization and work with these people.

Then probably one of the other highlights of the work I did in the regional office, I was co-chairman — a job I inherited. Bob Lancaster was the first—

LUZIER: Oh, I remember him.

GRONCKI: — co-chairman of a Communications Committee. The region and the station always had difficulty communicating. So they thought, well, one of the things they would do is set up a committee with joint chairmen, one from the regional office and one from the station. Dick Hubbard was the co-chairman on the station side. So I got to working with this committee, and I got to meet Bruce Yerke, who was the station librarian. Together we worked and started what at that time was called Calfornet.

There were no computers at that time, at least in any of the offices. Oh, the regional office had one, but it was the old-fashioned kind, you know, where they punched cards and all that. People on the forest didn't have ready access to library services. The state had a service-to-industry program, so we set up an agreement with the state, and through the National Forests, we made library services available to any forester in California. He could **be** with any other **agency**, he could be with CDF, he could be a private industry forester, and all he had to do was go to the local library, and he could access this system where he could get publications. Then we started putting out a monthly resume of all the new publications that were available. And all they had to do was check off any of those that they wanted to see, send them down to the library at the Pacific Southwest Station, and they would get them. It was so successful here in California that we expanded it into a Westfornet. Bruce and I went up to the University of Washington at Seattle and set up an agreement with them where they would handle the library system for Oregon, Washington**,** and Alaska. So then we had five states covered. We had Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California**,** and Hawaii covered.

Then after I left, why, in '80, why, it was expanded to cover the entire United States.

LUZIER: Wow. And you were the instigator, huh?

GRONCKI: Well, I'll give more credit to Bruce, of course, but... [laughs].

LUZIER: What's Bruce's last name?

GRONCKI: Yerke, Y-e-r-k-e. Yes, he's dead now. He was a great person to work with, very knowledgeable, and very educated. Yes.

LUZIER: So how long were you in the RO?

GRONCKI: I was in the RO for eleven years.

LUZIER: You retired from the RO?

GRONCKI: Yes. Yes, I retired in 1980; Leap Year Day in 1980. That's easy to remember.

LUZIER: And then you came back to Klamath country, huh?

GRONCKI: Yes. We could see what was happening to real estate, so in 1977, we came up here and bought this house. We didn't really buy it with the thought we would live in it, but we at least wanted to get ahead of the expanding real estate market, so we bought this house. After we moved in it for a while, we liked it so much we decided to stay, so we've been here since.

LUZIER: Are a lot of the old timers that were dear to you still around in this area, or do you go see them?

GRONCKI: Fewer and fewer of them. One of my favorite people was Al Crebbin, who was the deputy forest supervisor here on the Klamath for many years. When I first started, he was resource officer, and he had Timber Management and Range Management, and Lands, and I don't know what else. But he had a great command and knowledge of local ecology and forest management. Al was just a great guy to work with. He lived until '93, so we visited almost — well, actually, there's some trails back of the house here, and Al would walk his beagle back there every morning, and I started walking back there, and we ran into each other. So after that we made it a point to meet on the trail up there every morning.

LUZIER: With your dogs, huh?

GRONCKI: Then I would go to his house and talk to him, oh, **once** every two weeks or so.

LUZIER: So you have a lot of special Forest Service memories.

GRONCKI: Yes.

LUZIER: Can you relate about some of those, or have you done that in your talk already?

GRONCKI: Back — you mean, here on the Klamath?

LUZIER: Uh-huh — or anywhere. You probably have a lot of them.

GRONCKI: Well, you know, one of the most enjoyable things I did when Al was deputy, and he was also a range officer — Harry Taylor later took over the range job. But I would ride four or five times a year at least with Al Crebbin in the Marbles and the Salmon Trinity Alps. Pieces of those —

LUZIER: Ride?

GRONCKI: Ride, yes. Al taught me to, you know, how to pack the mules, throw the diamond, the Salmon River diamond.

[Interruption in Recording.]

GRONCKI: Turn it on, and we'll talk about it.

LUZIER: Okay, go.

GRONCKI: So Al taught me packing. And here, just last year, I got the idea of — I got into woodcarving after I retired, and I taught woodcarving at College of the Siskiyous for ten years. So I decided I was going to carve a mule and make an exact replica of the little pack saddle. This is the Salmon River Pack Saddle. It's exact, right down to the minutest detail.

LUZIER: It sure is; on a little board.

GRONCKI: I even made pack boxes and put Forest Service emblems on them.

LUZIER: You sure did.

GRONCKI: I can throw the canvas over and I can—

LUZIER: Pack it?

GRONCKI: — throw the diamond on that, put the boxes on.

LUZIER: That is just darling.

GRONCKI: But it looks nice just with the boxes sitting there.

LUZIER: Yeah. And then you've got a post— We'll get a picture of that. That's darling. [laughs] How cute.

GRONCKI: So that was one of the enjoyable parts of the job.

LUZIER: Do you have any other special memories? They're all special, I guess.

GRONCKI: Well, too many, really.

LUZIER: Tell us a few of the best ones.

GRONCKI: One of the things that I really enjoyed when I look back on my career were the people on the ground, in the field. I remember people like John McBroom, who was the trail foreman on the Salmon River District, just had such a great knowledge of the country, and such a hard worker and dedicated worker, keeping the trails open. Just — you couldn't — if you stood over the guy with a whip you couldn't make him work any harder than he worked. One of the problems, he had trouble getting assistants to work with him, because he worked them so hard.

LUZIER: He was a Forest Service employee?

GRONCKI: Yes. Yeah, he retired as trail foreman on the Salmon River District.

Oh, other people like Sam Wallace, who had been a ranger at one time on the Six Rivers Forest, and got into trouble, and got laid off. He came back to work for the Forest Service as a scaler, and but you know, just excellent. He just didn't require any supervision. You just knew that if you put Sam on the job scaling, you knew he was going to do a good job, and with just no questions asked. There are so many of those kinds of people at the district level that I oftentimes reflect on some of those people that I knew.

LUZIER: They probably didn't get the just credit that they were deserving of, huh?

GRONCKI: Right. Yeah, because, you know when you read the history books and whatnot, oftentimes these people are not mentioned that much. But they're the backbone, I think, of the Forest Service. You find it all over, wherever you go, the Forest Service had these kinds of people. They had this real dedication and commitment. You hear so much about, today, you know, people castigating federal workers, because, oh, they're slackers and they don't pull their weight. Well, that was never true of the Forest Service. These people just worked, you know, many more hours than they were paid for.

LUZIER: Yeah. I agree. So I can see, really, what I would like to ask you is what are you most proud of with regard to your role that you played as a Forest Service employee?

GRONCKI: Well, probably some things I already covered. I'm proud of the fact that I really had been one of the first people in the Job Corps Program and had a lot to do with helping design that program. Then working with Zane Smith, who at the time was forest supervisor of the Sierra. We started trying to develop a youth program, which eventually became the Youth Conservation Corps.

LUZIER: What year was that, now?

GRONCKI: That would have been about '70, '71. I made a lot of trips down to the Sierra. We had a couple of programs going. We tried different combinations. We finally settled — we tried school situations, and then field situations. Then what we finally settled on, what they eventually went into was, that is, take the kids out in the field, and then use the field experience, what they were working on at the time to develop the learning experience. So if you were out thinning trees, you would sit down with the group and say, "Why are we doing this?" And get them to start asking questions and talking. It really turned out to be a great way to teach.

An interesting thing is that people started talking about making these YCC camps coed. Some of the people threw their hands up in the air and said, "Oh, my God! What are we getting into?" And I remember Bob Lancaster was supervisor of the Los Padres at the time, and we went around asking supervisors who would be willing to accept a coed camp. And Lancaster volunteers. "I'll take a coed camp," you know.

You know, it was a plus. I mean — it was a plus. All of these fears they had just were unsubstantiated. If you have an all boy's camp you had problems figuring out after hour activities for the boys because you could get ball games going or whatnot, but eventually they wanted to find out where the girls were.

Well, when we got to coed camps, after hour activities were not a problem. The girls took care of that. The girls would get their record players out, and they'd start playing music, and maybe they'd have a little dance. Anyway, the girls are really the leaders in the recreational things that went on. And the sexual problems never did arise. If there were any sexual problems

that I'm aware of, it was between staff and the girls at the camp. And it was not between the boys and the girls.

But the other interesting thing, and I saw this happen: If you had boys out working on the project and you took a rest break, you'd have to say, "Okay, fellows. It's time to get working again." And they would complain and gripe and whatnot, and slowly they'd get back to work. If the girls were there, you didn't have to say anything. The girls would stand up and say, "Fellows, it's time to go to work," and they wouldn't object, because they didn't want to—

LUZIER: Look bad, yeah.

GRONCKI: — look like slackers to the girls. Boy, they just jumped right up. It was just a complete change in the whole attitude. It was just marvelous, just marvelous.

LUZIER: So then it started catching on, the coed part of it, huh?

GRONCKI: Oh, yeah, yeah, it did. And then all the camps were coed. The kids had such a great time. What they started doing — one of the camps did it, and then they all wanted to do it — they would develop a yearbook at the end of camp. They were only there, what, nine weeks, something — nine, twelve weeks. But they really enjoyed it so much, and the relationships they developed that they would get out a yearbook. It was very touching to see what they wrote and demonstrated what they had learned about the ecology and the environment.

LUZIER: Yeah, wonderful. I understand that you helped put together facts and figures about the history of the Klamath National Forest. Tell us about the book that resulted from this.

GRONCKI: Well, Russ Bauer started the *History of the Klamath* — Russ, the former supervisor, who was here when I worked at Happy Camp in the '50s. So Russ started with '05, and he worked until 1953. Then he got ill and wasn't able to continue, and he asked me to take that over and finish it. Gil Davies in the supervisor's office was involved in getting that going, gave us the clerical help and whatever monetary help we needed. So I finished — I did '54 through '60. Then Gil Davies published a book, *The Klamath History from '05 to '55*, so the two years I worked on, '54 and '55, are in that.

They did a non-hardbound edition through the ’60s, but that was never published, although they distributed it to the library system. I know the Forestry School Library at Berkeley got several copies. I don’t know if they sent it to the state library system or not. But that got fairly good distribution. That was a good project.

LUZIER: That’s interesting. I’d like to get a copy myself. So have you and your wife done any traveling since you retired?

GRONCKI: She’s originally a Canadian, as I mentioned, so every summer we used to go to Canada. We haven’t done that recently. Her health hasn’t been that good. But I still go to Canada every summer in Northern Ontario where I meet my brother. So we do some fishing together in Northern Ontario.

LUZIER: How many in your family do you have, your brothers and sisters?

GRONCKI: Well, I had a brother and a sister. My sister died two years ago. My brother is two years older than I am. He was a civil engineer, still living in Rockford, Illinois. I visit him every year.

The only extensive trip we made, we went to Spain in 2000. That was a marvelous trip. Yeah, we really enjoyed that.

LUZIER: That’s great. You’re never the same once you go out to any of those countries, I don’t think.

GRONCKI: Well, I think what it opens your eyes to is we have a tendency to look at America as having the highest standard of living, and we thought that that certainly wasn’t true compared to what we saw in Spain.

LUZIER: I believe you, yes.

GRONCKI: In Spain everything is so neat—

LUZIER: Yes. I’ll never be the same after going to France.

GRONCKI: — and clean, and new cars.

LUZIER: Yes, yes. It was very enlightening.

GRONCKI: Yes. The food and that was just fantastic.

LUZIER: The culture is wonderful. Yes, I was impressed. Do you have any special interests or hobbies? I understand you did the woodcarving and making canoes. Tell us about that. You're making canoes.

GRONCKI: Yeah, I've been into woodcarving now for about almost twenty years. I taught it for ten years. Then I got into making wooden canoes.

LUZIER: That's really something.

GRONCKI: I made two or three. Then the high school has a program for their seniors where they get to elect a project. I know the shop instructor over there. He sent this boy over that wanted to build a canoe and asked me if I would be his mentor in that. So I laid out what it would entail and the cost and whatnot, and he didn't shy away.

LUZIER: Oh, that is marvelous.

GRONCKI: Now, this is not the canoe he made under my mentorship, but he consequently went up to Eugene, Oregon, and he did this one on his own. So I know he learned his lesson, and it's a beautiful job.

LUZIER: And how many feet do you think this is?

GRONCKI: It's sixteen feet.

LUZIER: Oh, my gosh!

GRONCKI: Yes, he did a beautiful job.

LUZIER: Oh, it's just absolutely—

GRONCKI: Yes. I've got a picture of the one he made here, too.

LUZIER: He looks so proud.

GRONCKI: They have a contest with all these various projects, and he got a blue ribbon for his canoe.

LUZIER: I guess. He should have. Well, that's wonderful.

GRONCKI: So that was a fun thing to do. Yes, I really enjoyed making the canoes.

LUZIER: You must have been an Indian in another life. [laughs]

GRONCKI: Well, we had a canoe when I was growing up in Illinois. We used to canoe on the Rock River.

LUZIER: Is Rockford anywhere near Galesburg?

GRONCKI: No. Galesburg is more towards the Mississippi.

LUZIER: Yes, that's where my family is from. I've never been there, but that's where my family is from, named after my family.

GRONCKI: Oh, yes. There's a college in Galesburg. Some of my classmates went to Galesburg.

Two other projects I can think of that were fun: Working in general forestry assistance I found out there was a fund of money in Washington that was available for various projects if you could justify it. And one of the things, there was an association, ABAG, Association of Bay Area Governments, and they wanted to do a study on wood refuse that was available in the dumps in the Bay Area that would be available for cogeneration use. So we funded that. I remember working with ABAG people on doing that study.

LUZIER: Now, what are you talking about, ABAG?

GRONCKI: ABAG. It's an acronym for Association of Bay Area Governments. It's the various county governments in the Bay Area get together, work on various mutual problems.

Then there's a similar one in southern California called SCAG, the Southern California Association of Governments. I funded a project down there, and what it was meant to do was bring the recreational activities of all the various government agencies in the LA area together. These people had never gotten together and compared and say, "This is what we have," you know, and pooled all that information. We got Tom Neff, who had been my ranger at Lake Arrowhead and then was recreation staff officer on the Angeles Forest, to take that job. And he was over there, I think, for two years, and did a great job, and got all the various government — not only federal, but state agencies — you know, you've got state parks, you've got national parks, you've got soil conservation service, you've got California Department of Forestry,

you've got the Forest Service, you got the National Park Service, you've got the Bureau of Land Management, and all of these, bringing them all together and sharing planning information and resource information. So it sure was a good project. I'm proud of having a hand in getting that funded.

LUZIER: Yes. That's wonderful. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we conclude the interview?

GRONCKI: Well, another thing I did, we put on a lot of symposia, largely in wood utilization for the sawmill people and that sort of thing. But I remember we funded, through CDF, a session there on collaborative land use planning. We got the University of California at Davis to staff that, and we funded it. But we got various professors from UC Davis. Then we invited people from counties, from the National Park Service, many Forest Service people were there.

I remember Jerri Larson from the RO asked if she could come to that, and she participated in that. We got people — this is back in about 1977 — thinking and talking about collaborative land use planning, which was — unfortunately, we were maybe twenty years ahead of our time. And just now some of the people are starting to talk about collaborative planning. We've always had cooperative land use planning, but oftentimes that degenerates into, "Well, we'll send you a copy of our report, you send us a copy of yours," and people don't really get together and share planning information.

LUZIER: And what about multiple use — how do you feel about multiple use with the forest service?

GRONCKI: Well, I think — I remember when the Forest Service first started talking about multiple use, and I think it's a great concept and I think it's very valid.

LUZIER: Okay. Well, nothing else that you want to say? So thank you so much for your time and for sharing with us about your life with the Forest Service.

GRONCKI: Well, it's been a pleasure.

LUZIER: And the Job Corps. We've really enjoyed talking.

GRONCKI: Good luck to your program here.

LUZIER: **Yes**. We really appreciate you taking the time to share what you've experienced.

GRONCKI: No problem. My pleasure.

LUZIER: Thank you.

[Wav File 2.]

LUZIER: I understand that you walk once a week. Can you tell me about that?

GRONCKI: We started a hiking group eighteen years ago. Oddly enough, the fellow that I learned woodcarving from was an old German, had been in the German ski troops during World War II. He liked to hike and ski and that sort of thing. So he asked a group of us woodcarvers if any of us would be interested in hiking, forming a hiking group. So I said, "Yes, I would."

So we started, and I was a little dubious about this thing being a success at first, because for one thing, I didn't realize that there were that many good day hikes in this area. There are, we found that out. And so we've been going all these years. We hike roughly — well, the only day we've actually missed is Thanksgiving. We always hike on Thursdays, and Thanksgiving falls on a Thursday, so we don't hike Thanksgiving Day. And if Christmas falls very close to a Thursday, well, we don't hike either —but roughly about fifty times a year.

In the wintertime, we have to do low country hikes, or cross country skiing. Well, quite a few of us do cross country skiing. But other than that, you know we have five wilderness areas within an hour's drive. We've got the one on Mt. Shasta, and we've got Castle Crags. We've got Salmon Trinity Alps. We have the Russian Wilderness Area and the Marble Mountain Wilderness Area.

There's another one called the Red Buttes on the Oregon/California border. We actually went there once, but it's too far a drive, and people objected, especially if they come from Mt. Shasta and have to drive thirty-five miles to Yreka and then all the way down the river and all the way up [laughs] the other side. That was too far.

But we do, we just do an amazing amount of hikes in different areas. I was very familiar, of course, with the Salmon River, and it's given me an opportunity to really learn the trails on all the other districts on the Klamath — on the Shasta-Trinity as well.

One of the interesting things that happened, we were hiking up Bear Creek on the Shasta-Trinity and I saw this huge pine tree. I said, "Wow, that's got to be close to a national champ." But we didn't have anything to measure it, but we got various pieces of rope together, and I put it around there. Then when I got home I measured it and I said, "This is bigger than the national champ!"

LUZIER: Oh, my God!

GRONCKI: I have a picture of it over there on the wall. But it turned out to be a co-champ. It's within five points. Because it had a spiked top on it, and with that spike top on it, it would be the undisputed champ. But a strong wind came along and knocked that top off, and so then it lost twenty points. There's one on the Plumas that it's co-champ with. But that was interesting, yeah.

So we hike every week, and we do normal, I'd say, eight miles round trip.

LUZIER: Oh, I was wondering how many miles.

GRONCKI: With an elevation gain of maybe 2,000 feet. But we have done twelve miles, and 3,000 foot elevation gains.

LUZIER: How many people are usually on the hike?

GRONCKI: We average about fourteen. It's become sort of a social organization as well. So we have a lot of food events. If there's a food event scheduled — and these take various forms — we could have regular potluck at somebody's house, or we could have a tailgate party, or we could have a barbecue at some campground, or something like that. So if there's a food event, we have gotten as many as thirty-five.

LUZIER: And what time do you start, usually?

GRONCKI: Usually we start at 9 in the morning. I like to start a little earlier. We don't have a formal organization because we found out that if we had a president, vice president**,** and all this sort of thing, we're a formal organization, we would have to be incorporated, then we're faced with the problem of insurance. Somebody could sue the organization. So we decided not to have an organization. So the only formal business that we do is getting out a three-month hiking

schedule. We have a disclaimer statement in each of those schedules that says, "You're responsible for any decision you make on the hike on your own, and the group is not."

Then we had to come up with a name for the guy that got out the schedule. We didn't want to call him the treasurer or the secretary, so we call him the scribe. And the most recent scribe is a retired lawyer, so he has doctored up our responsibility statement a little bit. [laughs]

Then we have little statements that everybody has to sign if they're going to hike regularly with the group, saying that they realize, you know, they're taking responsibility for their own actions. Oddly enough, the only person that ever got hurt seriously was my wife. She broke her ankle in four places going down to Ishi Pishi Falls. And the Forest Service crew came and put her in a Stokes litter and hauled her out of there.

LUZIER: I'll be darned. Does she still go on hikes?

GRONCKI: No, then she quit hiking [laughs] against my advice. I thought she should have continued, but she quit after that.

LUZIER: Now you're the longest — you say you're the—

GRONCKI: Well, of the charter members of that group, I'm the only one that hikes regularly.

LUZIER: That keeps you young.

GRONCKI: We have two couples that hike once in a while.

LUZIER: Eighteen years, that's phenomenal. Well, thank you for sharing that.

GRONCKI: Okay. You're welcome.

[End of interview.]

WORD LIST FOR AL GRONCKI
[words in boldface need to be verified]

NAMES
Al Groncki
Susana Luzier
V-12 Program — Navy
Denise — Al's daughter
Charlie Yates — district ranger
Wes Hotelling — ranger Six Rivers
Sam Hall — timber management assistant
Ralph Clauwitter — in charge of timber preparation
John R. Murray — worked at Happy Camp
John H. Murray — not to confused with above
Hank Scheer — district ranger
Dick Wilson — ranger Inyo
Joe Radel — forest supervisor Inyo
Tom Neff — ranger
Sim Jarvey — supervisor San Bernardino National Forest
Don Bauer — supervisor San Bernardino National Forest
Reuben Sullivan — ranger at Happy Camp
Sergeant Shriver — famous, helped with Job Corps Program Director
Ed Cliff — Chief F.S.
Steve Yurich — supervisor Chequamegon National Forest
John Pager — center director Blackwell Job Corps Center
Bob Gustafson — coworker in San Francisco
John Beebee — assistant regional forester
Carl Hawks — cooperative force management
Bob McDonald — cooperative fire control assistant
Stanley Lynch — assistant rural area development
Jesse Kingsbury — assistant Manpower programs
Harvey Smith — forest product utilization
Jack Weddle — management Manpower programs
Bob Lancaster — co-chair of Communication Committee
Dick Hubbard — co-chair of station / region communications committee
Bruce Yerke — station librarian
Calfornet — cooperative group information retrieval system
Al Crebbin — deputy forest supervisor Klamath
Harry Taylor — range officer
John McBroom — trail foreman Salmon River
Sam Wallace — scaler, former ranger
Zane Smith — forest supervisor Sierra
Russ Bauer — started book, *History of the Klamath* Former Supervisor, Klamath N. F.
Gil Davies — helped with history
Jerri Larson — woman in RO, Director Women's Programs

PLACES
Yreka, California
Rockford, Illinois
Ann Arbor, Michigan
Houghton, Michigan
Eureka, California
Davis, California
Salmon River District
Shoshone, Wyoming
Orleans, California
Klamath
Happy Camp — Klamath
Inyo National Forest
Lake Arrowhead
San Bernardino, California
Mendocino, California
Alder Springs, Mendocino area
Nicolet National Forest, Wisconsin
Clam Lake, Wisconsin
Iron Mountain National Forest
Cadillac National Forest
Manistee National Forest
Rhinelander, Wisconsin
Great Lakes Region
Salmon Trinity Alps
Rock River
Galesburg, Illinois
Mt. Shasta
Castle Crags
Russian Wilderness Area
Red Butte — Oregon/California trail
Bear Creek
Ishi Pishi Falls

SCHOOLS
University of Michigan
Michigan State University This is mentioned, but Al did not attend.
Orange Coast College
U.C. Davis — University of California at Davis
Purdue University
University of California at Berkeley

BUSINESSES
National Door Manufacturers Association
Wyman Brothers Furniture — Rockford, Illinois
Blackwell Job Corps. Center, Wisconsin

U.S. Plywood

ACRONYMS
OEO — Office of Economic Development
CDF — California Forestry Department
ABAG — Association of Bay Area Governments
SCAG — Southern California Association of Governments
ARF — Assistant Regional Forester

MISC.
Diamond **—** area in Salmon River where they take pack mules**; a hitch for packing mules**
Westfornet — regarding Calfornet expansion fornet.