

On October 19, 2010 Christine Crilley-Everts conducted an Oral History Interview with Jack Holroyd. The interview was on behalf of the Park Warden Service Alumni Society. A condensed version of the interview follows:



John Charles “Jack” Holroyd has been a Lifetime member of the Park Warden Service Alumni Society for many years. Sadly, Jack passed away on October 1st, 2017 at the age of 89 years.

Jack was the son of John Charles “Bo” Holroyd (Park Warden Badge #10). Bo was well-known as a park warden in Waterton Lakes National Park. Bo, his wife and two children were stationed at a backcountry district at the time of Jack’s birth. Jack was born in Pass Creek cabin, Waterton Lakes National Park on September 4th, 1928. Travelling with his father Jack gained the practical skills and knowledge that would later qualify him to follow in his father’s footsteps as a park warden.

Jack’s father Bo was promoted to Chief Park Warden when Jack was about 5 years old. The family moved to Knight’s Lake about 4 miles from town. Over a time span of eleven years Jack rode his horse four miles to school and return. In winter, they used a horse drawn buggy that Jack and his family named, “The Acetylene Chariot”. Jack’s early education was in a small school in the town of Waterton and he finished his high school in Pincher Creek.

Jack loved to accompany his father on backcountry patrols. Jack recalled the uniform that his dad wore in the early days of the warden service. The uniform came with a very heavy buffalo winter coat and matching fur hat. His father had to approach his saddle horse carefully so that he was not mistaken for a grizzly. Some horses took exception to the buffalo coat! He recalled the trail crew projects and in particular the work done on the Crypt Lake trail. “To access Crypt Lake you have to cross Upper Waterton Lake which meant swimming our horses. Crypt Lake is a pretty little alpine lake. But one of the features that really got me was that you had to go through a tunnel in the rock to get to it. The tunnel was originally partly natural and because it meant either going through this tunnel or blasting a trail around a cliff face it was easier to enlarge the tunnel a bit.” Over the years Jack rode every trail in Waterton Lakes National Park. He possessed a natural love of the mountains and for traveling on horseback.

Jack married Janet and they raised two sons, Dave and Doug. He worked for a short time for an oil industry company. This career did not appeal to him and luckily, during this period he came across a poster recruiting park wardens. In 1959 he applied and was immediately accepted with his first posting to Banff as

assistant warden to Ernie Stenton. Jack, Janet and their boys lived at the Fairholme Ranch. After spending a couple of years in the Minnewanka district, he applied for and succeeded in getting a district warden job in Kootenay National Park. Their oldest son was about 6 years old at this time and Janet taught him by correspondence lessons. After about three years in Kootenay Jack was posted to Banff as the Assistant Chief Warden where he worked under Chief Warden Bob Hand for two or three years.

Jack was asked to go to Jasper as Assistant Chief Warden. He was very interested not to mention excited about seeing the backcountry of Jasper National Park, however, fate intervened and he was posted to the St. Lawrence Islands National Park in Ontario. Jack was transferred down there as Chief Warden (in the eastern region of parks) based out of Cornwall. This was a small park located on the St. Lawrence River. Jack had to act as Superintendent, Chief Warden, Maintenance Supervisor, and had no clerical support. He had a staff of about 25 or 30 people in the summer months and about 12 people the rest of the year with only one staff permanently employed. Jack's position was reclassified downward with the loss of a substantial part of his yearly salary. This was a huge blow financially. As a result, after about 14 months, Jack rethought his situation and was about to quit the service when he learned that he could take an educational leave to attend university. He applied and was accepted at both Queens and at the University of Calgary. He chose the University in Calgary where he earned a Bachelor of Science Degree with distinction as a mature student in 1970.

During the years Jack was attending U of C. he worked in the Regional Office in Calgary in the off-season when he was not in school. He worked for Bruce Mitchell at Regional Office and he also worked part time at the University. Jack always appreciated the support and encouragement from the organization which allowed him to get a university degree course under the auspices of the Parks branch.

No sooner did he graduate than he was offered the position of Superintendent of Prince Albert National Park (Waskesiu National Park). However, he turned down the offer as he felt that family came first. A move to Waskesiu meant that his two sons would have to be sent elsewhere for school. Although he realized that this decision would diminish his options within the warden service, he stuck with his decision. An opportunity opened up in Banff as Chief Naturalist. He worked in that position for a couple of years when he was offered the position of Superintendent of Pacific Rim National Park. Living in Ucluelet provided schooling options for his youngest son who was still in school. After about three years a move back to Regional Office in Calgary was made where Jack spent about eight or nine years. About the time Jack and his family moved to Calgary the warden service was going through a change from the district system to centralization. For families who had always lived in the districts it meant that in a lot of cases it allowed them to get some equity in real estate as well as schooling for their kids. During this period the qualifications for the warden service were upgraded. For many years park wardens were selected based on their skills in backcountry travel, competency with horses and if they were fortunate to be a good skier or mountaineer that as an asset. Most did not have degrees in wildlife management or related sciences and that was changing. As this change progressed Jack recalled receiving applications from candidates with a PhD for a seasonal warden position.

Jack retired in 1986 at the age of 57 years. He and Janet liked the west coast and decided to settle on Vancouver Island near Parksville. Later, Sidney became their home where Jack enjoyed fishing and owned his own boat for several years.

Jack retained a deep appreciation for the warden service. He liked the backcountry and the wildlife. He fondly recalled the climbing and ski schools with Walter Perren who he had deep admiration and respect for. He recalled, "Walter made a tremendous contribution to the warden service in particular with regards to mountain rescue and avalanche rescue". Jack recalled Walter's wonderful sense of humour. On

climbing schools Walter would joke with the wardens to ease their apprehension. He'd say, "Come on! You can climb that! My mother could lead her milk cow down there!" Walter's most famous comment to climbing students (while on an extremely high knife edged mountain top) was, "Stand up boys, you won't bump your head!"

Although Jack's career as a park warden was relatively brief, he never lost the fondness for the mountain parks, the wildlife, backcountry travel on horses and the warden service. Jack's experience as a son of a park warden and his own experiences as a park warden and later in management of national parks enriched his life and lead to a successful career in the National Parks of Canada.