

EVELYN WATERS
Interview 110a
December 10, 1986
Scott Eldridge, Interviewer
Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: In this short interview with Scott Eldridge, Evelyn Waters describes her life as a shepherd in Wyoming. She describes following the sheep through the mountains in summer and trying to keep them alive in the winter.

Scott Eldridge interviewing Mrs. Evelyn Waters. December 10, 1986.

Scott Eldridge (hereafter SE): This is Mrs. Evelyn Waters, she was born in Wheatland, Wyoming in 1916, April 30, and she is going to tell us some stories about when she and her husband were sheep herding.

Evelyn Waters (hereafter EW): We started out with our sheep operation in 1941, we had over 2,500 head of sheep and it was an occupation that you had to spend twenty-four hours a day with them. We lived in sheep wagons and tents and just in the open a lot of times. The first year we had them, in the summer time, we took them to the mountain range, we trailed the sheep around forty-seven or forty-eight miles and it would take nine days to make that trail. We would start out at daylight and go until almost dark, then we would make on the average of about seven or eight miles a day. We had a wagon and a team of horses that we hauled out salt in that we made out of tires that were cut in two and we had rock salt that we put out for the sheep about every other day.

We got to the mountains, a lot of them were rough enough where we couldn't take the wagon so we just left the wagon at the cow camp and our supplies, we took a horse with a pack saddle, the pack saddle had what we called "panyards" and they were boards, bucket like things that hung over the sides of the pack saddle. I'd put groceries in each side that we used for sheep camp and then about every four days I would have to ride horseback and go back to the cabin and get more supplies or whenever we would need them. We started out from the main cabin; we would go about a mile and a half or two miles and make sheep camp. We would stay there and herd the sheep up over the mountains, just in a small area and we would move camp every four or five days until we went clear to the farthest end of our land, which was about eleven miles. When we got that far, then we turned around and came back. But we had taken a sheep wagon over the mountains, it was a rubber tire sheep wagon, we didn't have a brake on it, we thought we would try that and see if we could have it to be in from the outdoors but it was a kind of coped up ordeal. We were moving one day and had a real steep mountainside to go down to get across the big canyon so we could herd the sheep off in a different way. The ends slipped off of the neck yoke, Brownie was driving the wagon down and when it slipped off, of course, it let the wagon run up on the horses hind legs and they began to run away. He was sitting up inside of the door, sitting on the stove driving them, and when he jumped he jumped up hill from the wagon, held on to the lines and pulled them into this bunch of

quaker trees and the up rooted about seven quaker trees. He was hoping that would stop them but it didn't. When it ran into these quaker trees the wagon began to roll, the wagon and the horses just rolled over and over, clear down to the bottom of this big draw, down in the rocks and the horses were fastened down in there. We had to cut the harness off of them to get them up out of there and they were all peeled up. The wagon was completely demolished. The only thing that spilled in that wagon was a half-gallon of strawberry jam. We didn't have anything to keep us dry or anything. I pulled the bed out and we had a piece of canvas that we had the bed rolled in and we rolled it up on the hill where we could bed the sheep down and watch them. Then I cut some poles and went down in the draw in the trees and crisscrossed them and tore the pieces of canvas that were big enough that I could salvage off of the sheep wagon and tied it around it so we would have something to make a cover over the groceries to keep them dry. But our main trouble were the bears. We'd heard in the night, or I could get up and see an old bear would be in the canned goods and stuff. Lots of times they'd get in and upset the butter and things that we needed. They'd take what they wanted and we would have to do without. We were about two miles from the cabin that had an old teepee in it. I rode the horse back and got that old teepee, the rats had chewed it and it had holes in it but still we used it to put our bed in to kind of protect us from the rain. There was an old piece of oil cloth on the table, an old bachelor had lived in that cabin and I took that big piece of oil cloth and put it up over the head of our bed so when it rained it would keep our heads dry anyway. It rained eleven days and eleven nights off and on, so we were wet most of the time.

Then we moved camp, we were getting back over in real rough rocky country and Brownie went back over to the main cabin with a two wheel trailer that they used to pull behind the pickup to haul salt up for the cattle and he cut a small quaker tree and made a tongue in it and clamped it to the tongue of that trailer and took the team of horses and pulled that trailer over so we could use it to camp in. We'd stay at camp about four or five days and, during that time as the tree would dry out that he had made a tongue out of, we'd get all of our things loaded up and he would get the horses hitched up to that trailer and start out and go over the rough rocks and the tongue would break and then our trailer would upset and everything would fall out on the ground. He would get mad, throw his hat on the ground, get the axe and chop another tree and make another tongue and our oldest daughter, she was just a little thing, about four or five years old, I would take her on the horse when I had the sheep. We couldn't leave them by themselves, somebody had to be with them all the time. We had three dogs that we used and one dog would work on the right hand side of the sheep and the other dog on the left hand side, and the other dog would stay behind with us. When those dogs worked we could signal with our arms and they would work and we would show them the signals where we wanted them to go. One old dog was just a three legged dog, he had gotten caught in a trap, he had three legs but he would do just so much work and then when you weren't out doing any work, why he would quit and he would lay down just as if to tell you "I've done my part, you get out and you do your part now." Then the back dog we would use him, but this old dog was pretty much chief of the dogs. We had a lot of rain and a lot of lightening and the lightening would be real severe and it would lighten down those big old granite rocks and they were huge, you could see the sparks flying, you could smell the sulphur when we would have a bad storm.

We'd take the sheep down in places to water, there wasn't a whole lot of water. Lots of times we'd have to go down to the spring and take a shovel and dam up a spring so we would have big enough places to water the sheep. There was one area where we watered them it was down a big deep draw and down at the bottom of it was a huge, great big drop, it was as big as a house. Brownie was always looking for bear. We got down in there and got the sheep on water, and after they'd drink they would lay down for about three hours. We walked on around the bottom of this rock and he hollered for me to come, we had our little daughter with us, Janet. He said "By darn, Ma, there's a bear in there? There was a hole under that great big rock." I told him, "You're crazy, you're always looking into holes hunting for bear and I'm not looking for no bear." But you could see where the bear had gone in, could see his tracks and he was dragging stuff in getting ready for winter, for hibernation. Brownie said, "Go get my rifle off of the saddle." We would carry our rifle on the saddle, on our saddle horse. He had a 30-30 and I went and got the rifle and I told him "You might be looking for a bear but I'm not." One of the little old dogs, a little old short leg sheep dog, we called him "Pooch." He said, "Come on Pooch, let's get that bear, come on, sic 'em, Pooch." I said "Well, I'm not going to stay down here I grabbed Janet by the hand and we went around back of the rock and went up on top. You could hear Brownie saying "Sic 'em Pooch, sic 'em." He was crawling in and out of that hole dragging his rifle along with him, along side of him. Just as I got up on top of the rock I heard a scuffle, scuffle, scuffle and I looked over the rock and here was the dog about twenty feet out from the rock, pretty soon here comes Brownie, his eyes just like an old scared Negro. They were just as big as could be. He looked over at me and he said "By darn, Ma, there is a bear in there." He kept shoving the dog in ahead of him and the dog met right face to face with the bear and he passed Brownie in the hole and beat him out of the hole. Brownie had to crawl out with his rifle and I told him "You're going to mess around and you are going to tie up with the bear one of these times, crawling in those holes." Well, he was satisfied that there was a bear in there and he wasn't going to go in after it again.

After the sheep had rested for a while we went on up to where we had camp that we bedded down at night.

After we wrecked the sheep wagon, all I had to cook with was just an open fire. I'd put the rocks out around and fix it around so it would hold the wood. I'd make a big bed of coals and I'd take a frying pan and cook on them, I had a big old cast iron frying pan. I'd make pancakes every morning for breakfast for us and I'd make enough pancakes and fry them and we would use them for bread for our lunch and for our supper. Brownie said one day, "I'm sure getting tired of these pancakes, I sure wish we had some light bread." By that time we were about two miles from the cabin that had a big old cook stove in it and I said, "Well, I'll mix up a big batch of bread tomorrow." I had yeast and flour, "And ride over to that cabin and make the bread." I took the bread pans and put them in a flour sack. I mixed up a big batch of bread in a great big old granite bucket that had a lid that I could tie it on. I mixed up the bread, got my pans and my shortening. I tied the sack on the back of the saddle and took my bucket of bread and got on the horse. Had to go about half a mile to the first gate, or maybe it was farther than that, maybe a mile. By the time I got off to open the gate I looked and the bread was rising and pushing the bucket lid off, so I untied it poked the bread down, it wasn't very sanitary but you couldn't think about being sanitary. I poked the bread down and tied it back on, went through the gate, got on

the horse and had another three quarters of a mile and came to another gate. I had to poke the bread down again, it was rising. So I got to the cabin and the rats had built nests in the oven, so I had to clean that up before I could build a fire. I worked my bread out in the pan. I had two tea towels with me and I covered it up with tea towels, got a fire built in the stove after I had cleaned the rats nest, put the bread in and baked the bread. I had about seven loaves of bread and I put it in a sack, tied it on the saddle and rode back to the sheep camp. We had light bread to do us for about three days. Then we were herding sheep one day up on this one mountain that had big old rocks around on it, it was a kind of a flat area and Brownie hollered for me to come quick. I was out on the other side of the sheep watching them and I rode over and he had lassoed a badger. He had one of the dogs and he was siccing the dog on that badger. When he got that rope on that badger it made him mad and he would come up that rope trying to get him and he would urn and sic the dog on him. So I told him "What in the world were you thinking, lassoing that badger, you know very well you won't get that rope off." He said, "Well, I'm going to sic the dog on him and when the dog gets hold of him, why I'll slip that rope off." I said, "The dog won't get hold of him." He had big old sharp teeth and claws. The dogs, we had two dogs then, and they would go just so close to him and then they would back off. I went and got a long pole, thought maybe I might be able to get hold of the loop on that rope and work it loose. That old badger was smart enough to where he would tighten it up. When you'd stick that pole at him he would just come right at you, right up that pole. So we finally took him over by a big rock, there was sort of a big hole down at the bottom of the rock. We got around at the top of the rock, Brownie said, "You take that rope and hold him up there and I'll go around and take the pole and get it in there and see if we can get it loose." We worked about three hours before we got that badger loose but, I'll tell you, we didn't rope any more badgers. That was an experience that we had learned a lesson.

On the 12th of September we had twenty-one inches of snow. One of the horses that we used for the team had gotten away from us and he was way over about four miles away where he stayed. But we took the one horse and the saddle horse and the lead of the sheep. The sheep couldn't move at all because the snow was so deep. He made a trail the sheep led out and followed him. I was in the back of the sheep driving them up. We had them strung out about three miles. After they walked for a while they'd get out and would make a little bigger trail. We had to trail about five miles to get over the main cabin. We had corrals over there that we could pen them in and we had hay and cotton cubes that we could feed them. Brownie said "Well, I'll have to go get that horse because we'll have to have the team to hook onto the wagon to take the sheep down to the low country?" I was watching the sheep, herding them up along the mountainside. Brownie rode over to get that horse. They were big old mountains and I got up high so I could watch the sheep. I could see him way off in the distance, he had his gun. He was trying to catch that horse and I could hear him yelling and cussing at that horse, trying to catch him and he couldn't catch him. Finally, I heard two shots and I thought, "Oh my lands, he's going mad and he shot that horse." But he shot right in front of the horse and it scared him and the horse stood still and let him walk up to him. That was the only way he was able to catch that horse out in those mountains. He led him on down to the cabin and we got the wagon loaded and then we left early the next morning. The snow had melted some but we could

only go about three or four miles a day and we got the sheep down to the main ranch. His dad had bought another sheep wagon so we were just right across the river, White River, and we kept the sheep on one side and the main ranch, the buildings and the cattle were on the other side. He'd get up every morning and go over and help. He had a twin brother, and he would help his brother and dad feed the cattle and I would go out and herd the sheep. But our bedding had gotten moisture from being inside the sheep wagon and that canvas had drawn moisture, it was damp all around the foot of the bed. I built up a good fire, Brownie had put wood behind the stove the night before and I'd built up a good fire to make it real warm in there and dry out our bed. But the sheep, the snow was deep enough that they wouldn't go off the ground until they were warmed up. It was ten below zero. Finally about ten o'clock they decided to go on out and graze in a bean field where we raised beans and then they were up on the hillside. Of course, they were going on up and I had to get around them with the dogs so they wouldn't go where they weren't supposed to be 'cause they would go off for three miles if you didn't get around and head them back. I had a pair of sheep lined britches that I wore and I had overshoes with the sheep lined pack that the Air Force men wore and a heavy jacket and I walked on across that field and got up on the hill, led the dogs around the sheep and turned them back. After I got them turned around to work down to the bed ground, why I looked down and here was smoke coming out of the sheep wagon. I ran down off of those hills, down across that bean field, the snow was about ten or twelve inches deep, and running in the cold I got short winded but I was yelling for Brownie to come with every breath I could. I kind of gave out so I stopped and pulled my overshoes off and just left the packing, getting rid of some of the weight so I could run. I got down to the sheep wagon and grabbed a shovel and chopped off blocks of snow because I knew as soon as I opened that door that it would burst in flames so I'd take those blocks of snow and open the door real quick and throw it in on the stove and shut it again. I had to reach in around a little cabinet to get the water bucket and I threw several blocks of snow in there to snuff out the fire a little bit then I grabbed the water bucket and, in my excitement, I failed to take the shovel with me. I was running to the river to get water. Our sheep wagon was probably a hundred yards from the river and it had ice frozen on four or five inches thick. As I ran out I didn't go back after the shovel, I ran out on the ice and was hitting the ice with the bucket to break through. I got out far enough where it was thin and I fell in. The water came in and filled my leather sheep lined britches full of water but I just went ahead and got water, the ice broke and I ran and threw a bucket of water into the door and shut it. During all this time I was yelling for Brownie, hoping he would hear me because they were out feeding the cattle. He happened to look over and saw me running with the bucket to the river. Then he saw the smoke so he jumped off of the hay wagon and ran to the barn, threw a bridle on one of the saddle horses, jumped on it bareback and came over there, and he had to ride about a mile and a quarter, had to come up over the river bridge to get down to the camp. By the time he got there I had the fire out but my clothes were frozen solid on me. His dad came with the pickup right quick and they gathered up the sheep and he told his dad. He and his brother had gathered up the sheep and he told his dad. "You take Ev over to the ranch so she can get those frozen clothes off." They had to work around me, my pants were frozen so hard that I couldn't bend my legs to get in the pickup so they had to stick my legs in and get me in on the seat. I rode over to the ranch with Brownie's dad and his mother came and they got me out of the pickup. They had an

old wood cook stove that we cooked on. They put a chair and opened the oven door and stuck my legs in the oven. Ice all melted, there was water all over the kitchen floor but that was the only way they could get those pants off. It hadn't done any damage to my legs because I kept warm with that ice on there, but we had to keep the sheep over there then and stay there. Then we would go out on the other side of the river where there was another mountain and we herded them up on that mountain. We stayed at the ranch until we bought another sheep wagon and moved out to another area.

SE: Thank you a lot.

EW: I guess that's the end of my story.

END OF INTERVIEW