

ORAL HISTORY 2019-09

Harry D. Baer

Ron Hagelin, interviewer

October 1969

Unidentified location in California

Harry Baer and Ron Hagelin talk as they look at photographs.

Harry Baer talks about the Roosevelt elk originally moved from the Olympic Peninsula to Kodiak and then Afognak Island in the early 1930s. They caught the elk when they were little calves. There were eight of them. They were shipped to Kodiak where the government had an experiment station. They decided to move them to Afognak once they were a little bigger. The job was given to the hatchery where Baer worked to arrange for the move. Baer and Ken Chernoff were selected to make the move. They didn't know anything about moving elk. They brought a scow over to collect the elk. Their handler got them up on the ramp and things would shift and the elk would jump off. Baer decided to rope one and lead them onto the scow which didn't work. They had to return to Kodiak to get materials. They beached the scow during a high tide and loaded the elk on. On the next high tide they floated off. They traveled over to Afognak Island and released the elk. At the time they were a little over a year old. The cow elk all had calves the following year. One cow swam over to Whale Island. He wasn't sure what happened to it. One of the bulls used to come up to the hatchery and gave people a bad time. When they were first on Afognak Island there wasn't much hunting pressure on them.

Hagelin asked Baer if the fish hatchery had any facilities on Afognak Island. Baer said they had their main hatchery on Afognak Island. They had a station on Kodiak. The lumber for the hatchery was cut right there where they had a saw mill. They used spruce. They used the wood for fuel, too. They had about eight married couples living at the hatchery. Baer told a story about a dog getting in trouble with the elk. The dog got the elk to chase him and the elk corner Baer and the dog. Baer said they were big animals. Hagelin talked about the remains of the hatchery. Baer said he lived there from 1927-1932. The hatchery closed in 1933. It was during the Depression. He went over to Idaho to work on a hatchery.

Hagelin asked him about egg collection operations. Baer said at Afognak that was mainly a sockeye hatchery. Every other year they would take some humpback eggs to ship to the state of Washington. Every other year was a lean year for them and they were trying to build it up. They took eggs from the tributaries that ran into Afognak Lake. The salmon would come up in spring and early summer. They also took steelhead eggs for shipment to the states. They discuss steelhead populations.

Baer and Hagelin discuss salmon returning to their streams. Hagelin asked why they had the hatchery at Afognak. Baer talked about regulating take in the area. They had to close the fishing down to allow escapement. They would let about a million fish go up the rivers.

Hagelin and Baer talk about escapement numbers changing. Baer thought they should have maintained what they used to have. He talks about the different conditions affecting the spawning.

Hagelin asked about the weather in the area. Baer said the temperature was mild, but it could be cold, rainy and sleet. He said it only got down to zero once. They talked about dealing with the wind.

Hagelin commented about the cannery people. Baer talked about some of the workers who came to the cannery. Some of workers would go out and take whole crops of the ptarmigan. The ptarmigan would be gone when he went hunting in the fall.

Hagelin asked about the bear population. Baer said he did shoot one. They had brown bears at Kodiak. Cardiff Lake was the favorite place for guided hunts.

Hagelin asked about Afognak Lake fish. Baer said they had sockeye, steelhead and a few chinook. It was mainly sockeye. They had Dolly Varden, too. Once there was a bounty on them they disappeared. The Dolly Varden would eat the eggs of the salmon and steelhead.

Hagelin asked about deer. Baer said there were no deer. He said they did drop two of them on the island and he found one of them. He used to see deer in the southeast eating along the beach in the winter. They also had red, cross fox and weasels on the island. They didn't have wolves. Baer talked about transplanting beavers.

Baer and Hagelin run through the photographs of the elk transplanted again and Baer identifies them. He said it didn't take long for the elk to make themselves at home.