

Dave Hage - Interview - 11 / 28 / 1996 and 9 / 10 / 2004

I was born in 1929, just a year or so before the great depression got underway.

There weren't a lot of sagegrouse in the country when I was a kid. At least we didn't think so at the time. You would always see four or five flocks in nearly all the canyons. And there were always sage grouse on the meadows in late summer and fall. It seemed like there were good years for them and bad years. Only now do we realize how abundant they were as compared to what there are today. Now days you can drive from Tonopah to Elko and never see one.

Some of my earliest memories were while we were living on the old Bellows Ranch. The Bellows Ranch was located there on the North Fork of the Humboldt River just above the Devil's Gate. My mother's family, the Claytons owned a large part of that country at one time.

Archie had the Rancho Grande, Al had the Hay Stack, Art had the Cotant, Charley owned the Devils Gate, and my grandfather, George Clayton had the Ten Mile Ranch. Their father, Warren Clayton, served as Justice of the Peace in Elko in the 1920's. The Claytons built their own freight roads and sidings along the railroad.

When the depression hit, the Claytons lost about everything. My Grandfather said that he had enough money in the bank to cover his debt. Unfortunately, doing right by the costumers was not one of the banks objectives, and my Grandfather was foreclosed on.

Later, my uncle, Jerry Clayton leased the Mountain View Ranch in Star Valley. Then the Bellows Ranch on the North Fork. In 1945 he leased the Arascada Ranch which was located between the mouth of the South Fork and the Old Hunter Ranch. Then in 1950 we moved to Pine Valley, when my Uncle Jerry bought the Plummer Place.

There weren't any deer to speak of in the country when I was a kid. I can remember going down to the People's Market in Elko. People's Market was located there on Idaho Street between 4th and 5th street at the time. They had a cooler in the back of the store and someone had killed a deer - it still had its hide and horns on. People from all over town came to see that deer, it was something to talk about.

Not long after, it got to where there were deer everywhere. I can remember in 1951 and 52, when we were living on my uncle's place in Pine Valley, there were deer in the pasture at the ranch all the time. There were deer all over Nevada. In 1951, there was an old fellow from California, shot a buck right across the mountain from us, in Diamond Valley, just below the old Joe Flynn place. The Buck didn't have monestrous horns, but he weighed 371 pounds. He was a buck that was about twelve years old according to his teeth. Not only were there a lot of deer at that time, they were bigger and healthier then than they are now.

The deer were a product of the livestock industry. There wasn't a lot of feed in this country when it was first settled. Livestock improved the range. Sheep did the most good. They eat the weeds and brush - and as a result there is more grass. Cattle help to, but it was the sheep that did the most good. When they used to trail sheep through the country twice a year, that was when the country was the most productive.

Of course, predator control also played an important role. Predator control got to be a big thing in the 1930's. For a while there, they were hiring trappers as a way of putting people to work. It was part of the work program that was put in place after the depression. There were people trapping on every mountain range in the state. They put bounties on lions and bobcats. It got to where if you saw a coyote it was a rare thing. That's when we had the most game in the country.

Now its just the opposite. For thirty years now, the government has been discouraging predator control in every way they can. The effects have been obvious. Deer and sagegrouse numbers have been steadily declining for nearly thirty years now. It's a matter of record. When livestock were at their peek - when predator control was at a peek - when government was being held in check - that was when we had the most wildlife. It's the management that we have that is the problem. Get rid of the management we now have and it wouldn't be long until we'd have the kind of game that we had back in the 1940's 50's and 60's.