

Tom McClure interviewed Alice Andrews on April 16, 2024, in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Tom McClure: The interview we are conducting today is a part of a joint project between the Pryor Center and the Ozark Society to document some of the history of the protection of wilderness areas in Arkansas during the last 50 years. I am Tom McClure interviewing Alice Andrews for the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Oral and Visual History project. The interview is being conducted in Fayetteville, Arkansas on April 16, 2024. Alice, all I need you to do now is to state your name and indicate that you are willing to give the Pryor Center permission to make the audio file and related material available to others.

Alice Andrews: My name is Alice Barrett Andrews, and I'm happy to give permission to the Pryor Center for the verbal release.

TM: Okay. Thanks, Alice. Today, Alice Andrews is joining us from Little Rock. Alice earned a BS degree in biology and home economics with a minor in psychology from Southwestern State University in Weatherford, Oklahoma. She did an internship in clinical laboratory science at St. Anthony's Hospital in Oklahoma City with a degree as clinical laboratory scientist from the American Society of Clinical Pathologists. Alice did a required

continuing education throughout a 47-year career in medical laboratory testing, blood banking, chemistry, hematology, and teaching. She was the supervisor of an outpatient lab, then was supervisor of clinical laboratories continuing education for all lab employees. Alice also worked 35 years at McClellan VA Hospital and eight years at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in New York, New York. She served three years in Santa de Copán. Did I say that right, Alice?

AA: Santa Rosa de Copán.

TM: I'll let it stay there. In Honduras at Hospital Occidente?

AA: That's right.

TM: On an American-Canadian medical team. Well, once again, Alice, we're so glad you're here and thanks for being a part of this project.

AA: I'm delighted.

TM: We have some questions for you to consider today but would also want to encourage you to talk about other things besides these four questions that you would like to say. Our first

question is, will you please describe your involvement in efforts to protect wilderness areas in Arkansas?

AA: Yeah, I'm glad to do that. I certainly have not spent a great deal of time, but I was sort of early in Arkansas after living in several other states and got here just in time to really get involved in wilderness. The first thing I'd really like to talk about is the wilderness hearing in 1983, conducted by the legislators, Dale Bumpers and Ed Bethune, who, to this day, are heroes of mine. I was one of many folks at a packed auditorium on the Yale campus who expressed their deep feelings, their love for the existence of wilderness, and environmental concerns to be heard. It was an intense all-day meeting. It ran seven to eight hours of public comments, which was absolutely amazing to me. Excuse me. Following the hearing came the Arkansas-Oklahoma Wilderness Act in 1983 next. Then the congressional subcommittee met, the hearings were held, and finally, the Wilderness Act of 1984 became law. I spoke toward the end of the hearings, grateful that so many people had spoken up for wilderness and the need across Arkansas for federal designation of wilderness. Human beings, as well as wildlife, need the serenity founded wilderness for contemplation and for clearing our minds. The formal comment that I made follows, and that is,

there have already been too many compromises. We happen to live on a small planet with limited resources. As its custodians, if we don't lead the way in taking care of it with both our love and wisdom, then who will? Primarily, my real heavy-duty interest began in looking out for wilderness. I had visited probably most of the wilderness areas in the state. Most of those were probably way ahead of me and the people who took care of all of these wildernesses and made sure they took place before I got here. Anyway, I would like to say that I think we're blessed with several special wilderness, such as Caney Creek, the Cossatot, Upper Buffalo, Belle Starr Wilderness, which few people seem to go to anymore. And my favorite, the Lower Buffalo Wilderness. I would like to share this story. Kirk Wasson, whom most of you know, led an extended hike on the Lower Buffalo. This is quite a few years ago. He took us to an interesting cave, one of many in the old zinc mining area. There were huge piles of rock, still prominent. Kirk then headed to an old pipe, which he knew about, and he cleaned it out and had really nice potable water, was coming from some underground spring. A great evening followed as we listened to the frogs and crickets, a whip-poor-will, and what we decided was either a curious coyote or a bear. As we broke camp the next morning and resumed our hike, we

noticed some colored ribbons tied around limbs and felt certain that they had guided a horseback group to a camping site. We went home with pockets full of ribbons we removed. Walking toward the Buffalo River, we discovered a small cemetery very well-kept. It could be reached by boat or a long walk, but we were just amazed at how nicely it was being cared for. On another planned trip, we engaged with a back country horseman to clean up a large campsite below a high bluff, which had a cave at the base of the bluff. This area was known to the National Park Service, and they were delighted that we offered to clean it up. The Ozark Society members hiked down to the bottom of the bluff and began gathering up trash and supplies stashed in 55-gallon drums, both inside the cave and one can on the outside. There were also several very large tarps, somewhat covered with dirt and grass and mildew, difficult to pull up, but we did succeed. And we were so delighted to be working with the back country horsemen. They were stationed at the top of the bluff and the contents of the barrels were wrapped in large heavy-duty bags and hauled by rope to the top of the bluff by the horsemen partners. They were then strapped on a horse's back to be carried out of the wilderness and placed on trucks for disposal at a county facility. Everyone was really tired and really

happy. New friends sharing the cleanup. Folks whose goal is keeping our precious wilderness natural, wild, and free of trash. On another Lower Buffalo Wilderness hike, a long section of old road was sighted where many cedar trees had been cut down and pushed aside, presumably to widen the road. Many tree limbs were hanging over the road, and they had also been cut down. This required some tools, most of which are prohibited in wilderness. How can we stop this illegal destruction of protected wilderness? Perhaps more education, more significant signs explaining the outdoor benefits of rare treasures, like many species of plants, trees, birds, animals, and the precious solitude and contemplation available. Reminders are essential that visitors may not leave camping, fishing, or hunting gear, or building a hitching rail, or stash supplies in caves or elsewhere. Neither can one host a fireworks display. No mechanical devices, ORVs, or chainsaws. Respect these rare and amazing places. And to that, I would add, why cherish and protect wilderness? There are some good questions. Our small planet is seriously crowded. Global population is rampant and it continues to increase crowding. And crowding exists on almost every continent. We need wilderness for our health and sanity, a place of solitude to breathe clean air, to be able to see sparkling waters, to admire

flora and fauna, to meditate and enjoy the rare silence. We humans, as custodians of wilderness, must preserve these precious wilderness acres with our love and wisdom for future generations. And yes, there still are problems, some of them are human, some of them are animal, but there seems to be a lack of public interest. There's the feral hogs, prescribed fire, human abuse. We have to also inform and educate, and we'll get there. So that's my great hope. Tom, I think that's it.

TM: Well, that was a lot and well said. Thank you so much for that, Alice. Do you want to add anything to question one about your involvement in efforts to protect wilderness in Arkansas before we move to question two?

AA: I don't think so. My main thing was all the friends I met that had been working on wilderness before I came along. I was involved with RARE II quite a bit. Of course, that's another subject, but I did testimony, attended a lot of meetings, visited a lot of wilderness areas, and promoted, but I never considered myself to be a top leader in that. I just participated with a lot of joy.

TM: Well, it took a whole lot of people and thank you for being a part of it. Question number two is, will you please describe how you feel about protecting wilderness areas in Arkansas and what

value these areas have for you personally? And then also, if you would, assess the value for the people of Arkansas to have these wilderness areas available both now and in the future. And I know you've already done some of that, but I just wanted you to add to it, if you want to.

AA: Well, there's not much I can add except to say that there are problems and we've talked about that, but I think there is a community in Arkansas and beyond that care greatly about wilderness. It's very special to me personally to be able to walk into wilderness and see the difference where it's a place that people are truly caring for, to see no trash, to see no ribbons tied on trees, directing people to where there were built-in places to tie up an animal. Of course, I mentioned the feral hog problem and prescribed fire, but human abuse is there also misusing wilderness, the intent for it. But the ability to go in and breathe clean air and to be able to just be quiet and enjoy the silence, watching the flora and fauna, that all means a great deal to me. I think it's a wonderful place for people to be quiet and think about things they may not think about when they're at home in a bustling city. I think we all need wilderness for our health and sanity, for the solitude, and the friendship, the exercise. It's all very special to me.

TM: Well, thank you very much, Alice, for that. We'll move on to question number three, which is, do you have any special stories about people or experiences or anything that had to do with your efforts or other people's efforts to protect wilderness areas in Arkansas?

AA: No, I think I've probably covered that. There's so many treasures to look at. I've met plants I'd never seen before, and we had always seemed to have with us people who were experts on identifying unusual plants. We even saw some orchids in the Lower Buffalo Wilderness next to the river. I saw some lizards I've never seen before, one scorpion and one shy tarantula. So there was always something to look at.

TM: Yes.

AA: I didn't mention, I don't know how much interest that would be, but Kirk also took us to, that was the area where we camped on that particular trip was close to where the zinc mining had been going on many years ago, and there's still a huge amount of evidence of big rock piles from the mining, and he took us into a cave next to one of those rock piles and it was completely dark, but they had used that area for stashing a number of supplies and most of us managed to bang our heads in there on unseen

overhead rocks. Anyway, it was amazing to see how active that area had been in mining. Fortunately, it's gone now and I'm happy about that. And I suppose probably most of you that are interested in wilderness on the Lower Buffalo, there is a fairly large area where a lot of old cars and car parts are stashed. A lot of people, when they pass by there, want to get in one of the cars and have a photo made. I've seen that happen a few times. Then it's very interesting, the National Park Service, of course, manages that wilderness and they made the decision to leave the cars there as just part of the picture. Other than that, I think the Lower Buffalo is a really wonderful place near the Buffalo River, and access to it is easy. I think there should be more signage, educating people about wilderness and why it's important. I think that area could definitely be an educational place. So I would vote for some new signs and maybe we could financially help the Park Service to do that, but I think it might help and they would probably eventually be vandalized, but a lot of people simply do not know anything about wilderness, never heard of it, and might even be somewhat fearful of walking into a place as wild as wilderness we hope is. So I'm all for education of the public.

TM: Well, thank you, Alice. Those are some good points. Question number four, would you like to add anything else that you think needs to be emphasized about the history of wilderness protection in Arkansas that you think the public should know about or consider?

AA: No, I would just be repeating myself. I think we need to educate. We need to speak up. We need to encourage people to come and listen to why wilderness is important. A big concern of mine is global, that the whole world is extremely crowded and that's going to continue to get worse. And to have wilderness, I think, is a matter of helping us stay healthy. I'm a big advocate of meeting up with the public and trying to persuade them how important it might be to not buy that piece of land for a field or for some industry, but to do exactly what you're doing, Tom, is to meet with the Forest Service, meeting with the Buffalo River National Park staff. They've got a very nice staff who are also interested in wilderness. And I think that we probably are not speaking enough to how important it is to save these beautiful spaces. I think we've had some pretty good luck, and mostly that's coming right from you, Tom. We've had some good luck meeting with the Forest Service and the Park Service and saving some areas of wilderness potential. I'm really excited about that,

that I think that's going to be a great way of gaining more wilderness. I think Arkansas is blessed with quite a few wildernesses, but you can't have too many.

TM: Well, thank you, Alice, for that. Is there anything else that you would like to mention that I have not asked you about that's on your mind or that you would like to share with the public or with others what your thinking is?

AA: No, I don't think so, unless you name something that I haven't mentioned.

TM: Well, I think you've done a great job and it's whatever you want to mention. But I think, at this point, if you have any thoughts about any of your past, the questions that we've had, or other comments that you've made, if you would like to add anything to that, or if you have something new that you would like to say about wilderness or its value to the public or have any stories about people or anything you want to say, we've got time and just add what you want to.

AA: Well, some of this will be repeated. I did write a little bit about how can we stop this illegal destruction of protected wilderness. Perhaps more education, more significant signs explaining the

outdoor benefits of rare treasures like many species of plants, trees, birds, animals. And of course, my favorite solitude and contemplation reminders are essential that visitors may not leave camping, fishing, or hunting gear, or building any kind of structures, nor can they stash supplies in caves or overhangs of rock, and they can't host a fireworks display. No mechanical devices, no ORVs or chainsaws, but I think some of those are still being used. We have to press on with respect for these rare and amazing places.

TM: Thank you very much, Alice. Well, if you have anything else that you think of, just go ahead and interrupt me, but I'm going to go ahead and just close out here. I would just like to thank you again for being here on behalf of the Pryor Center and the Ozark Society and sharing your perspectives and your ideas and your thoughts about wilderness and about its protection for the future and what it means to you personally and also to the people of Arkansas. And some of those will be born in the next few decades. And I think some of them were doing things and you have done things that will benefit people in the future. The Pryor Center would also like for you to know that they will provide you with a copy of this audio recording at some point in the future.

And I just want to thank you again for being here and I'll just say goodbye for now.

AA: Okay, Tom. Thanks very much. You've been a great guide.

TM: Thank you. Bye.

AA: Bye now.