



Smithsonian Institution Archives

## Oral history interviews with Fausto Bocanegra, 1988

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., <a href="mailto:osiaref@si.edu">osiaref@si.edu</a>
<b>Title:</b>	Oral history interviews with Fausto Bocanegra
<b>Identifier:</b>	Record Unit 9561
<b>Date:</b>	1988
<b>Extent:</b>	0.1 linear meter.
<b>Creator::</b>	Bocanegra, Fausto, 1926- interviewee
<b>Language:</b>	Language of Materials: English

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## Administrative Information

### Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9561, Bocanegra, Fausto, 1926- interviewee, Oral history interviews with Fausto Bocanegra

### Use Restriction

Restricted.

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## Historical Note

Fausto Bocanegra (1926- ), mechanical assistant, carpenter, guide, patrol, general laborer, and animal caretaker, worked on Barro Colorado Island (BCI) from the early 1950s to 1988. Born on 6 November 1926 in Buenaventura, Colombia, Bocanegra arrived on BCI on 7 October, 1952 at the age of twenty-six. He first came to the island as a temporary construction worker, building the new laboratory building. Due to his excellent work he was requested back by the foreman, Francisco "Chi Chi" Vitola.

Over the years, Bocanegra's versatility served him well. He became the principal caretaker for director Martin Humphrey Moynihan's large collection of monkeys and other animals. He also served as a very knowledgeable guide to the island, not only for visitors but for scientists who wished to study the flora and fauna of the area. As a member of an unarmed anti-poacher patrol, Bocanegra captured poachers in a number of instances. In addition, he operated the launches carrying messages and transporting materials and visitors between Frijoles Station and the Island, cleared trails for general use, and attended to general maintenance of the Island. Bocanegra retired in 1988 after thirty-seven years on Barro Colorado Island.

The Canal Zone Biological Area (CZBA) was established in 1923 on Barro Colorado Island (BCI) in the Panama Canal as a reserve for scientific study of the tropics. Originally designed as a consortium of universities and government agencies by Thomas Barbour, William Morton Wheeler, James Zetek, and others, CZBA was transferred to the Smithsonian Institution in 1946 and in 1966 was renamed the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI).

## Introduction

The Oral History Project is part of the Smithsonian Institution Archives. The purpose of the project is to conduct and collect interviews with current and retired members of the Smithsonian staff who have made significant contributions, administrative and scholarly, to the Institution. The project's goal is to supplement the published record and manuscript collections in the Archives, focusing on the history of the Institution and contributions to the increase and diffusion of knowledge made by its scholars.

The Bocanegra interviews were added to the Oral History Collection because of their rich documentation of Barro Colorado Island and the people who lived and worked there. Additional information about the Canal Zone Biological Area can be found in the Records relating to the Canal Zone Biological Area, Office of the Secretary, 1912-1965, and the Canal Zone Biological Area, Records, 1918-1964, which are also housed in Smithsonian Archives. The Oral History Collection also contains several other sets of interviews on the history of the research station.

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## Descriptive Entry

The Fausto Bocanegra Interviews were conducted in August of 1988 by A. Giselle Mora M. The original transcript is in Spanish. An English translation was also prepared by Maureen Fern with comments by George Angehr, Jorge Ventocilla, and Georgina De Alba. The interviews discuss Bocanegra's youth, over thirty years work on BCI, and reminiscences of fellow workers and scientists such as Martin Humphrey Moynihan, Oscar Dean Kidd, Carl B. Koford, James Zetek, Adela Gomez, and Francisco Vitola, c. 1952-1988. Box 1 contains 75 pages of Spanish transcript, 89 pages of English translation, and four audiotape cassettes and occupies 0.07 linear meters of shelf space. The interviews are open to researchers, but may not be cited, quoted, or reproduced without the permission of the Smithsonian Archives.

The interviewer, Giselle Mora M. provided the following introduction to the interviews: History is made by men and historical events have diverse protagonists. Historic events and circumstances are lived out in different ways by the different groups mentioned, and it's common that the history that is printed and recorded represents only one part of the historical process under consideration. It is also common that the voices of the most humble and their vision of history are those that are ignored or actively silenced. This manuscript attempts to contribute in part to the recognition of the role the workers of "el monte" or "the bush"--to use the words of Bocanegra--have had in the establishment, growth and consolidation of the biological station on Barro Colorado Island, Panama, which today is one of the most important centers of investigation in natural sciences in the tropics.

These transcripts record the words of Fausto Bocanegra one week before his retirement and present, in general, his version of life on the island and changes that occurred on it between 1952 and 1988. All of the interviews were carried out on the balcony of a bedroom at the station, where Bocanegra and I shared many cups of coffee. Fausto Bocanegra--"Boca" like we all call him--dedicated thirty-eight years of work to Barro Colorado Island and carried out every task imaginable: game-keeper, guide, research assistant, electrician, sailor, carpenter, and retired as a trash collector. For those of us who lived on the island, Boca was an institution unto himself. But Boca was, first and foremost, a trustworthy man, a diligent worker, and a generous friend.

The final manuscript is the result of six hours of taped interviews and the reader should always take into account that what he is reading is a transcription of the spoken word. I decided to leave intact colloquial language, incorporating sounds and casual expressions; nevertheless, the text has been edited to eliminate contractions and phonetic errors that make reading difficult. The interviews were very slightly structured, and I am conscious of the fact that they do not clearly record the richness of Boca's

knowledge; nevertheless, the reader will find in these pages accounts of island life at the end of the fifties, information about life in the Canal Zone during that era, and perhaps most importantly will be able to know a little about Bocanegra and how he evaluated his thirty-eight years of service on Barro Colorado Island.

The realization of these interviews has been a privilege and a pleasure for me. I want to thank Mr. Fausto Bocanegra for having shared with me these and many other pleasant conversations. My thanks also to Dr. Joseph Wright who has supported and been a driving force behind this project since its beginning. Giselle Mora, Barro Colorado Island, 24 October 1988

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

### Subjects:

- African American history
- Latin American history
- Tropical biology
- Zoology

### Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Interviews
- Manuscripts
- Oral history

### Names:

- Bocanegra, Fausto, 1926-
- Canal Zone Biological Area. Barro Colorado Island
- Canal Zone Biological Area. Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute
- Gomez, Adela
- Kidd, Oscar Dean
- Koford, Carl B.
- Mora, Giselle. interviewer
- Moynihan, M.
- Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute
- Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. Barro Colorado Island
- Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. Canal Zone Biological Area
- United States. Canal Zone Biological Area, Barro Colorado Island
- Vitola, Francisco
- Zetek, James, 1886-1959

### Geographic Names:

- Panama

## Container Listing

Box 1

Transcripts of Interviews

Box 1 of 1

Interview 1: 15 August 1988

Box 1 of 1

Interview 2: 22 August 1988