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Collection Overview

Repository: Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title: Robert K. Enders Oral History Interviews
Identifier: Record Unit 9562
Date: 1976
Extent: 2 audiotapes (Reference tapes).
Creator: Enders, Robert K. (Robert Kendall), 1899-1988, interviewee
Language: English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation
Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9562, Robert K. Enders Oral History Interviews

Use Restriction
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Historical Note

Robert Kendall Enders (1899-1988) was born on September 22, 1899, in Essex, Iowa. After receiving his A.B. and Ph.D. in zoology from the University of Michigan in 1925 and 1927 respectively, he became an Assistant Professor of Biology at Union College. In 1928, he became an Assistant Professor at Missouri Valley College, and in 1932 was promoted to full Professor. In 1966, he also became Emeritus Professor of Zoology at Swarthmore College. He retired from Missouri Valley College in 1970.

Enders was encouraged by Harvard biologist Thomas Barbour to visit Barro Colorado Island (BCI). He applied for a National Research Council Fellowship for funding and in 1930 arrived on the island. In 1935 and 1937, he returned, and in 1941, he visited BCI again as a Research Fellow of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. While conducting his research in mammalogy on BCI, he observed the development of the research station. As a Professor, he continued his visits to Panama, bringing students to the Canal Zone Biological Area on working field trips.

The Canal Zone Biological Area (CZBA) was established in 1923 on Barro Colorado Island 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 Robert Kendall Enders interviews were recorded and donated to Smithsonian Institution Archives because of his experiences in Panama during the early development of the research station. 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, also housed in the Smithsonian Archives. The Oral History Collection also contains several other sets of interviews on the history of the research station.

Descriptive Entry

The Robert Kendall Enders Interview was conducted by Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute research biologist, Neal Griffith Smith, on April 13, 1976. He discusses his introduction to Barro Colorado Island; his subsequent research trips there; recollections of fellow scientists and staff on the island; comparisons between the island then and now; and suggestions on how to improve the island for research purposes. The interviews consist of 2.0 hours of audiotape cassettes and 56 pages of transcript.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:
- Interviews
- Mammalogy
- Oral history
- Tropical biology

Types of Materials:
- Audiotapes
- Transcripts

Names:
- Barbour, Thomas, 1884-1946
- Chapman, Frank M. (Frank Michler), 1864-1945
- Enders, Robert K. (Robert Kendall), 1899-1988
- Koford, Carl B.
- Missouri Valley College
- Smith, Neal Griffith, 1937-, interviewer
- Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute
- Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. Barro Colorado Island
- Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. Canal Zone Biological Area
Swarthmore College
Union College (Schenectady, N.Y.)
United States. Canal Zone Biological Area, Barro Colorado Island
University of Michigan
Zetek, James, 1886-

Geographic Names:
Panama
Interviews

Interview 1: April 13, 1976

Covers his reminiscences of scientists and staff on BCI and suggestions for improving research facilities, c. 1929-1976, including: Visits to BCI subsidized by various fellowships; reminiscences of Frank Michler Chapman and Thomas Barbour; installment of first electric light plant; ecological changes on BCI; reminiscences of CZBA director James Zetek, especially his interaction with staff and scientists; small number of scientists on the island; reason for lack of students at BCI early on; reminiscences of James D. Shropshire; importance of the staff on BCI; sailing on the cayuco; importance of the trail-end houses; learning to navigate without trails; large cats on the island; reminiscences of later CZBA director Carl B. Koford; Smithsonian Secretary Leonard Carmichael's conference on BCI; bringing electricity to the island; installing a washer and dryer on the island; bringing students to BCI; legalities involved in adding reserves to STRI; change in attitude about the importance of students on BCI; attempts to bring symposia and conferences; suggestions for improving physical facilities for research; branching out to deal with the tropics worldwide; reminiscences of Abram Conrad, Frank Drayton, and naming the other trails; and other suggestions for research on the island.

Transcript, pp. 1-56, of audiotape recording, 2.0 hours.

Audio Recordings of Interview: Total Recording Time: 2.0 hours

Note:
- Original Masters: 2 audiotape cassettes
- Preservation Masters: 6 7" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes; 4 digital .wav files
- Reference Copies: 2 audiotape cassettes; 4 digital .mp3 files