

Web Blog English II

Redlands - 29 Palms, CA.

1/9/2008

Redlands - Beaumont

Still mist over the canyon when I say good-bye to Sandra, Russ, Toby and Lois and Howell. I am leaving well rested, well nourished. The dirt road is now dry. The horses in the ranch at the beginning of the canyon are still surprised seeing this creature with its peculiar cart.

There is much traffic on the freeway. During my walk to Jerusalem I used to wave to all the drivers that came across. I sent some good thoughts, and I enjoyed very much the short encounter. It gave me energy. Now I do it again; but I am not used to do it with a harness and a cart – and suddenly I am tumbling, falling and hurting my right hand. Three dirty, bleeding sore.

I change to the other side of the road and start the first aid. I clean the wound with a tooth stick, take the little stones and dust out. How to wash it without water? I think of my religion teacher, the minister Albert Widmer in Basel, Switzerland. Among other stories he told us how the farmers in the Swiss mountains wash fresh wounds with their own sterile body water... I feel my full bladder – behind the tamarisk tree and the washing and disinfection can take place. And then I let the bruised parts dry. Isn't it a miracle? As soon as the skin is harmed all the cells that can help arrive, the leucocytes, the platelets, the fibroblasts. Hormones are emitted that promote the healing process. A protecting cover is formed and the new skin can grow slowly and steadily. During the night I cover the wounds with a band aid, add some ointment to the location where there is pain.

Why do I write all that? Isn't it the same miraculous force that heals our body and covers also the bare desert sand hills with a fine green grass cover after the rain?

In Beaumont I see a beautiful park with old trees, a big lawn, with a children's playground next to a little hill. What a treat if I could put my tent here! On the hill there is a daycare center. I ask Roslyn, the friendly lady with an English accent. She makes a phone call and tells me that's OK for me to camp in the park. For the first time I build the nice 4-seasons North Face tent. I am enjoying afterwards the autonomous snail house feeling. Through the open tent door I admire the orange evening sky, the mountains with their last glow, the sparkling stars and the very thin moon sickle.

James who takes care of the park lives in a trailer nearby: "You follow the heart", he says. "I try that too. Maybe soon time for me to move on." Before I asleep I am thinking at my mother with deep gratitude. She would have turned 100 today.

1/10/2008

Beaumont – wind farm near Banning

The first thing today: A haircut. The Filippino woman does a good job – short, but all the same not the “marine look”. The second thing: A good breakfast with a spinach omelette. I want to pay my bill. The waitress says: “It’s paid already. A friendly couple and their Italic-American friend – his roots go back to Palermo, Sicily – are very interested in my walk and invite me for the meal. During the whole day I walk along the freeway number 10. Looking at the map I am concerned how I can walk this stretch without using the freeway. Allen and Russ look up the Google maps in the internet. We see some options, but it’s a nice surprise finding myself on a quite big deserted road, having the whole road for myself. On the right hand side there is the summit of Mt. San Jacinto, on the left hand side the peak of Mt. San Gorgonio, both snow capped, majestic. There is a big bill board showing the Swiss tennis player Roger Federer - Pacific Life Open, 3/10 – 3/23/2008. There was recently a contest of a newspaper in Basel: Who is the guy or woman of then year 2007 in Basel? He won, I was only 2nd. Now he looks down on me, very big, 12 feet tall ☺.

Straight ahead I see a huge wind farm with hundreds of windmills on the hills and plains next to Palm Springs. New big wind generators are presently in construction. Enormous cranes lift the gigantic tubes and top them on each other. I am thinking of the joke: “What’s the difference between a man and a boy? There is no fundamental difference. Only the size and the prize of the toys differ. But seriously, crucial, essential toys...”

It’s impressive how our perception is shaped by our needs: Somebody works for a nuclear power plant or a thermal oil power station. The power lines cut through our landscapes in order to transport the electricity. He may like this technology and these installations. Somebody like me see these huge central power station as a dangerous, polluting damage to the landscape, to our planet Earth. On the other hand, I like the appearance of huge wind farms, with their white wings turning in the wind, the Sun’s daughter, driven by this cosmic force. I am also aware that they don’t pollute the air and don’t produce poisonous waste. But the man who works for centralized energy power stations may see the wind farms as ugly intrusions into our natural areas.

I put my tent near a wind farm of 62 windmills, between desert bushes, coyote tracks, and desert mouse holes. What a joy to congratulate my friend Albert Hofmann -- he as a chemist, discovered LSD – to his 102nd birthday, at 2 o’clock in the morning, calling him from my tent.

1/11/2008

Wind farm near Banning – Palm Springs

The sun wakes me up. I let the tent dry and walk towards the sun. Why did I choose to make the SUNwalk from West to East?

I enjoy very much – and I did that already walking from Switzerland to Jerusalem – to walk towards the rising sun. Teshuva in Hebrew – return, change: How many people were traveling under the most difficult circumstances from East to West?! The greed for gold couldn't answer the question how we can keep our wonderful planet inhabitable. The answer is embedded in the gold of the Sun. Yes, it's beautiful to walk towards East.

I make a detour of about 20 miles – the steep dirt road through the wind farm towards route 62 is too difficult for me and James. And also the perspective to get a hot shower and a nice shave motivates me to accept the additional distance. At the beginning of Palm Springs there is a modern visitor center. Two gentlemen p answer all my question and provide all the information I need – for accommodation, grocery store, public library, route to find my way out of the town the next morning. They give me even some gifts, tea bags with organic peppermint tea, body oil, strings, and mineral water. "That's for you!" They suggest to me to choose the motel with the closest location. On the map my European eye estimates a walking time of 10 minutes. It will be an hour...

I experience the distances about 4 to 5 times longer here in the USA compared to Europe. For a very tiny little distance on the map hours are needed to walk these stretches. Slowly, but steadily my organism gets used to this new frame of reference, to these huge miles.

1/12/2008

Palm Springs – Yucca Valley

Again and again crows are sitting next to the road, on telephone poles, on rocks. With their "Krrrrah, krrrrah" they press the awareness song out of their shiny black and tense body, the beak half open, beak and tail moving up and down. I think at Aldus Huxley's "Attention, here and now!" in "Utopia".

Often they pass by on their rattling motor bikes, the Harley Davidson knights with the round helmets, the leather outfit, and the arms often in "hands up" or "monkey" position, the legs widely open. I often wave to them. One of them puts the hand out, sideways, another one lifts a finger form his elevated hand. A third one nods slightly. Short encounters the give me energy for my walk.

I feel these days how the endorphin level rises, how the euphoria increases. This is enhanced by the large space I walk through, by the play of light and shadow on the dry, colorful slopes, by the ever changing huge sky that we in Switzerland are not at all used to; but also by these short encounters with the people who use the same road, these short shared moments of life. Today there was an especially moving moment: A big crowd of motor bikers drove towards me on the crossing

lane, maybe around a hundred people. I am waving, the arm widely open. There is a variety of responses; but the last man on his huge shiny motor bike with the red side tanks on each side of his machine is opening up himself completely and greets me back with a last crowning greeting gesture and a broad smile.

There are two white little crosses next to the freeway, some plastic flowers and a sign: "Please, don't drink and drive." And: "In memory of Jose and Esmeralda Camacho."

The first big cactuses appear, also the first Joshua trees. There is a lot of littering. With the metal stuff I see one could easily open a hardware store, screws, tools, tubes. There are signs that invite people or companies to become responsible to take care of a part of the highway – "Adopt a highway!" In Basel citizens can become responsible for the care of a tree and its surroundings. Here – in a similar way – one can become sponsor for the cleanliness of a part of the highway.

In Morongo Valley I buy a sandwich and meet Mira. She has left Russia in 1964. It's her accent that let ask me about her roots. "I was still there when there was the big war going on." I also meet Ed when I buy a drink in a gasoline station. He is a Kurd from Northern Iraq who lived in Bagdad for a long time. He came to the USA in 1984. Saddam was a terrible, cruel man; but what's going on now there is much worse. Much more killing." Ed suggests to me the motel Yucca Inn in Yucca Valley, the first accommodation entering the town. I am very grateful for his help when later I arrive there in complete darkness. At the Yucca Inn I meet Moses. He emigrated from S Korea in 1983. He welcomes me with a "High 5" when he hears about my walk. He is happy to meet another protestant. One can meet the whole world in a remote desert valley.

1/13/2008

Yucca Valley – 29 Palms

The walk from Yucca Valley to 29 palms is easy and pleasurable. A man stops his car – it's easy to recognize him as a minister: I have passes you already this morning; but I couldn't stop. I had to be in the church in time." When he learns that I come from Switzerland he speaks about his Swiss years with enthusiasm: "I studied at the ETH in Zuerich (Federal Technical University). It was actually the best time in my life. And do you know the best thing of Basel? The train that brings you back to Zuerich." An old Swiss joke in the middle of the California desert on a Sunday morning...

There is a long range of palm trees at the beginning of 29 Palms. I count – really 29 of them.

In 1972 I flew over these desert areas. After an externship as a medical student in Ravenswood Hospital in Chicago I made a big trip through the USA, together with a school friend and his wife. Flying over the Arizona and California desert I was amazed: such huge stretches of

desert land, almost no settlements, only a few colors. And now I have the privilege to walk through all this beauty. And again, like on my walk to Jerusalem, I am becoming aware of the curved shape of our planet. The mountain ridges in the West disappear, new mountain ridges come up in the East, and after a while the walker realizes that he or she walks on a huge perfect ball – Earth. And with every step I can touch this unique planet – this oasis in the universe.

My friend Allen Holmquist from Monrovia offers me to join me for the coming days, for the Mojave Desert crossing. He and Russ Rice who drove him here have brought water and food to some places along our route – my dear desert guardian angels.

1/14/2008

29 Palms – Pass to Amboy

I am really a lucky boy: Allen takes off from work for two weeks. Although he hasn't walked more than 15 miles a day before that, he accepts to risk a 6-day walk through the desert with daily distances of 20 to 28 miles. He organizes, together with Russ, food and water for the time of the desert crossing. In advance, he gets in touch with people along the way. He wants to help me. He is concerned that it may be too difficult for me to cross the Mojave desert alone; and he also attracted by the challenge of the desert hike. It will become a wonderful week that we share together.

During the first day we get from 29 Palms to a pass. First the lonely completely straight road crosses a big plain. Then it climbs up the mountain slopes. A little truck follows us and turns after having passed us. The short, smiling Old Fellow is excited: „ I saw you already in the morning. Where do you walk? Great! I am also a biker. I made big bike trips all over the USA.“

Again and again we see colored spots in the tan sandy landscape, between the thorny bushes. Little Lupine plats with purple flowers, pink blossoms – they cover the road shoulders, like little waterfalls, a perfect mandala formed of regular leaves. On the long stems golden little suns wave in the wind. There are also little flowers with little white four-leaf stars with a purple center and tiny little green-yellow seed stems.

Already quite early in the afternoon the shadows grow longer. The evening with its vivid play of light and shades is crawling into the mountain slopes – they are lying at the horizon like huge sleeping dinosaurs. The street gets steeper and steeper. The sun is approaching the horizon line. Then she mingles together with the mountain ridges near the snow capped Mt San Gorgonio and disappears. What follows is the mute symphony of colors, the hour of awe, the sky at first orange, then golden, later becoming pink, purple, turquoise, midnight blue. The slopes at first red from the evening glow, becoming pale, grey, brown and dark, and all of a sudden they start again to shine, in a special golden light. Then the night comes, and the mountains get covered with black velvet and the stars and the half moon are sparkling and shining.

The night is cold and clear. Orion, our star guide during the solar transatlantic crossing is present again. It makes also here the vast space familiar, home. Far away, at the end of the large desert basin in front of us, we discover the lights of Amboy, the destination of the next day.

1/15/2008

Bristol Dry Lake - Amboy

What a pleasure to walk down into the moon landscape, red sandstone, tan rocks and sand. Mountains are swimming like islands in the sandy plain. In the middle of the flat Earth bowl there is a white salt lake - „you will see the stuff, they make salt from“, announced Casey to us, the receptionist in 29 Palms. There is very little traffic. Almost all of the drivers wave back, one of them stops: “What happened?” a young lady asks thinking our walk is the consequence of an accident. “How are YOU?” Allen asks. „I just had a difficult moment“, she is sharing a pain with us. We wish each other a good trip. She wipes her tears away, smiles and drives on.

The walking down was such a joy – the walk through the endless plain becomes a real challenge. It’s so far, very far, the day is hot. We can always see the destination, the white speckles of Amboy; but it just doesn’t seem to come closer. We arrive at the salt lake “Bristol Dry Lake” and cross it on a dam. The salt has crystallized in flat, frozen waves. Where there is still water, new fantastic colors can be seen, turquoise, marine blue, grey, silver, white. There are rows of little regular mounds, dirt that has been piled up from the salt harvest.

We see also little points that are moving across the landscape – cars on Route 66 that drive through Amboy; also the long, long trains that sneak like caterpillars through the desert. We hear the honking from far away whenever they cross a road. I am counting the telephone poles, 12, 11, 10....; then again 12, 11, 10... My back hurts, the muscles are tired and aching. Allen with his long legs is far ahead, the distance to him becomes bigger and bigger. After an hour of walking the cars are still little points, barely bigger than before. After another hour we could differentiate more details, the cabins of the long trucks, some colors; but it takes still a long time until the vehicles have Dinky-Toys size; and it takes another jour until we arrive finally, finally at route 66, at the railway tracks at Amboy. Allen and I, we are both quite exhausted, the first time that I am “amboyvalent” about today’s challenge, maybe the most difficult stretch of our desert hike.

Amboy had its great times in the middle of the 20th century, mainly in the glorious Fifties when Route 66 was still THE main connection between East and West. After the construction of the big freeway 40 this road with its famous tradition has been abandoned. It’s still cult destination for some nostalgic route 66 worshippers and Harley Davidson riders. The famous ROY restaurant reminds of Amboy’s splendid times. The design of the ROY sign evokes memories of the kidney shaped table

design of the fifties. Now, everything is deserted, the restaurant, the motel, the school. But Farrel is still here. The man with the cowboy hat, the tanned face and the small moustache lives in a trailer. He works as sniper shooting teacher, as Sheriff of the area, as one of the last inhabitants of Amboy. He shows us a place to camp. He gives us a drink and Snicker bars and he passes the water and the paper back with the food on to us that Allen and Russ have left here.

We take some distance from the settlement in order to put our tent – there is a noisy generator nearby. A little, fat dog makes a short visit. It casually evaluates our luggage and food supply and leaves us soon without having undertaken any risky adventures.

1/16/2008

Amboy - Danby

A long uphill climb on Route 66 brings us to a pass at the edge of the salt lake basin. We reach the next desert plain. Towards noon we have suddenly a strong cold headwind against us. On the pass some walls of ruins, painted with graffiti, provide some protection from the strong wind. We put some litter away, choose some wood boards to sit on and enjoy our lunch. The wind slows us down considerably, and it's already getting dark when we arrive at the bridge near Danby where Russ and Allen have hidden our food and water.

Today we sleep under a bridge, in a wash, underneath route 66. And every time a car passes, we hear a quick "dudumm dudumm". We don't expect any thunderstorm. Therefore we feel it's safe to camp in the wash. The hunt for our buried treasures becomes exciting. The water we find immediately – under the bridge, next to a beam. The search for food is more thrilling: A rock shows the place where the food has been buried. Allen takes his little plastic shovel and digs. Nothing, He continues to dig, nothing than pebbles and sand. The shovel breaks. Allen continues to dig with what's left. No bag, again. Doubts come up. This tracks there, were they there. Has our food been discovered and stolen?

What an overwhelming feeling of bliss when the broken shovel hits the paper bag. We take the precious bag out of the sand, clean it, and open it: A big bottle with organic blackberry juice, mozzarella, crackers, peanut butter, oranges, apples, Clif bars. After a day of battling the strong headwind it's an unbelievable joy to find such good food in the sand under a bridge.

The Clif Bar, a new discovery for me: Healthy food, light, very rich, good protein source, ideal for hikes. Gary, the owner of Clif Bar & Co. writes on the bag how this project has evolved: "In 1990, I lived in a garage with my dog, skis, climbing gear, bicycle and two trumpets. The inspiration to create an energy bar occurred during a day-long, 175-mile ride with my buddy, Jay. We'd been gnawing on some 'other' energy bars. Suddenly, despite of my hunger, I couldn't take another bite.

That's the moment I now call 'the epiphany'. Two years later, after countless hours in Mom's kitchen, Clif Bar became a reality. And the mission to create a better-tasting energy bar was accomplished. Thanks, Mom!"

1/17/2008

Danby - Goffs

Wind and long plains are challenges for the energy of us hikers. I become aware what gives us energy.

In the morning we take time for individual mediation and chant singing. Singing and thinking at beloved friends gives so much energy. It has been shown that singing provokes the production of hormones that improve the immune system and influence our mood in a positive way – Oxytocin, Dopamine, Endorphins, Melatonin and others.

Connecting with nature's miracles also gives us energy – the colorful sky, the sun, the moon, the stars, flowers, trees and beautiful landscapes are wonderful energy sources.

Getting in touch with other people who are on the road can also give energy, waving, sending good thoughts, a smile, seeing a hand behind the windshields, sometimes the V-sign, sometimes five fingers that point to the sky. I will never forget the little hand that came out of the dark locomotive window after having honked to greet us, now waving and pointing towards the huge sky.

If I imagine what a good exercise the walk against the wind is it makes life a lot easier. I imagine my legs how well they are used, how well the blood circulates in the arteries and veins. And isn't it a wonderful kind of treadmill to be surrounded by this astounding nature?

Also daydreams help a lot: I imagine arriving in Boston, seeing my friends again, or in Basel where I hug the people I love. We dance, we celebrate, we have great food (including a nice dessert ☺), we experience mutual tenderness. All that can make the steps light and joyful.

Allen and I have also good and deep conversations about life, our visions, plans. During these sharing times the walking continues easily, and the aching body is forgotten for a while.

In Fenner we pass the freeway 40. Nearby there is a restaurant, at the same time store and gasoline station. The owner has drawn a sign. He asks clients to be patient and not to complain too fast and too often. "Remember how difficult it is to offer such services in the middle of nowhere." Well, the Veggie Burger, the potato and the pasta salads don't give any reason to complain; and also the beautiful dark eyes and the big smile that meet my eyes and my smile give a boost of energy...

Phil is expecting us already in Goffs. He has stopped a car on the road and asked whether the driver has seen two hikers before. Yes, they have another two miles to go. As soon as we enter the little ghost town of Goffs, Phil appears on his electric golf car. Phil was engineer at General Motors. He developed a chip that makes machine maintenance much easier. For his achievement he was promoted as one of the about 20 GM fellows. He enjoys early retirement. His hair under the cowboy hat is long and blond. He has a pipe in his mouth, golden metal glasses. About four times a year he comes here from Indianapolis with his "Hummer" and works here for a month or so. He tries to revive this little ghost town and keeps it clean and shiny. There are about 60 people all over the USA who help Phil in this endeavor. Phil offers us a hot shower. We can also sleep in his kitchen wagon. So we don't have to put our tent in the dark. Phil has solar panels on his trailer; but he doesn't believe in climate change. He thinks the changing solar winds are responsible for the warming of our atmosphere. I wished from my heart, Phil was right. We don't get into a debate that evening. It would be good to stay here for a while in order to work together and to find a trust level that would allow a deeper sharing and mutual understanding why we have such diverging opinions.

1/18/2008

Goffs - Klinefelter

Today is easy – only about 18 miles. After days with very little traffic we get onto highway 95 that brings many people to Las Vegas for gambling.

Today I am experimenting with my harness. I am successful in shifting the weight much more to my waist. The shoulder gets relieved – what a wonderful feeling. I am aware how the energy flow in my body is reestablished quickly. Such adjustments are also needed at other levels. All the solutions for an energy system with 100 % renewable energy and energy efficiency are ready. It needs an adjustment of the favoring conditions so that this promising industry can develop even faster and fuller than it does already today.

My body is healed completely again. The Achilles tendon inflammation has been healed fully; and also the sores of my right hand are again covered with new skin.

We look for a camping place near the freeway 40. The next morning we want to walk on it to Needles because there is no other path or road down to the Colorado River Valley. Not far away from the freeway we find the oasis of Klinefelter. Some fat palm trees and a Tamarisk tree wood appear suddenly in the middle of the desert, next to a wonderful spring. Carlos sells honey and dried fruit in front of his trailer next to the road. He offers us the trailer for the night; but we prefer the wood as camping ground. A fantastic place: Thick old tress, a dense canopy of tamarisk needles, a soft needle floor. I find an ideal clearing for our tent. The place has two disadvantages, one that we can solve, another one we have to accept: The first one is a lot of litter that we can remove. The second is the railway track nearby and a crossing road so that the

locomotives honk loudly and long when they pass. So we are awoken again and again during the night, but going to sleep on 7 30 PM we still get enough rest for the next day.

We put up the tent shortly before sunset. The evening gold flows towards us through an open space between two trees. Our tent lights up like a small dome. When a train passes, the tent starts to blink. Between every railcar, the light floats through; like that the tent blinks for quite a while with more than a hundred railway cars passing...

Soon the moon silver turns the little clearing in the middle of the old trees into fairytale magic. It would be nice to return here with some friends and to clean up this sacred place in order to return it to Mother Earth, beautiful again.

19.1.2008

Klinefelter – Needles

On the left emergency lane we walk down towards Needles on Freeway 40. A coyote sees us, like a little wolf. It watches us, makes some steps, looks again, it wiggles its tail. It stretches head and neck in order to hurl; but we don't hear it – the passing trucks are far too loud.

A little bit later a rabbit hops through the bushes. When it sees us it hides behind some plants. We only see the V-sign of its long ears. As long as we don't move, it stays also there. When we move again it continues its fast flight, almost flying over the dunes before it disappears.

A Highway Patrol-car stops. "You are not supposed to walk on the freeway" the policeman tells us with his determined voice. Allen replies friendly: "There is a law – and several people confirmed that, that we can use the freeway if there is no alternative path or road. We looked for the old route 66, but it's washed away. We want to leave the freeway again at the River Road exit." "Yes, I heard about this regulation before. Well, keep as left as possible, and leave the freeway at River Road." "This man walks through the USA, from coast to coast," adds Allen. "Wouldn't that be something for you?" The friendly policeman laughs: "I don't know. Bye now."

Soon we are in Needles, my last stop over in California before I start to walk through Arizona. The Colorado River appears as a broad shiny water ribbon flowing through the fertile valley. Green fields are a surprising contrast to the eye after these days in the desert. We find a small motel, the Needles Inn. Mary, the friendly, white haired owner, offers me the computer for my paper work.

Allen evaluates whether friends will pick him up here or whether there is a car that he could rent for his return to Monrovia. Nothing works out. So he takes the train number 3, around 1 AM, the only passenger train, the same one that brought me to L. A. on 12/27/07. We look for the station in the afternoon and find the tracks next to a big 100 year old

station building, with columns, colonial style. It will be renovated and used as a hotel.

Needles is an important railway station. We meet Derwin Lee Self, President of the local brotherhood of the locomotive engineers. He has sold two models of Union Pacific locomotives to a Swiss customer 25 years ago and wonders whether this person will read this report and could identify himself. He invites me to visit him and his family on my way to Oatman.

We speak also to other locomotive engineers and drivers. We learn a lot about the BNSF locomotives (Burlington Northern – Santa Fe). And that waving back to people who wave to the train belongs already to their tasks as long as the railway exists: „Could you imagine, a child waves to a train, and there is nobody who waves back?“

Waiting for the train in the middle of the night Allen and I speak about our wonderful desert experience. Our friendship has deepened. When we showed each other nature miracles that have not been seen by the other one – these were the most beautiful moments of our adventure, a special geological formation, a unique flower, a view, an animal – sharing the enthusiasm about our Creation that connects us so deeply.

The train is delayed. I say good-bye to Allen and walk back to the hotel. Suddenly I hear the honking and later the loud noise of the train. A Swiss newspaper has sent me an e-mail and asked me what and who impresses me. I have found the answer: Allen, his help and generosity. They made a wonderful start of my trip possible. They provided me with experiences that will be essential for the rest of my long journey.