

Web Blog SUNwalk 2008 – engl. V

1/29 – 2/5/2008

Grand Canyon Caverns – Grand Canyon

1/29/2008

Grand Canyon Caverns – Seligman

It seems to me that a good fate brings me often together with people who have very different life stories and views. I am thinking back at Farrell Hastings in Amboy. He watched over our food supply. He showed us a good camping site. He welcomed us with mineral water and Snicker bars. He works as a Sheriff in Amboy, and at the same time he is a teacher for long range shooting and angle shooting. He also teaches counter sniper classes. His card says: “Tactics, fieldcraft, marksmanship”. I also think at Phil in Goffs – GM Fellow, Hummer driver, denying climate change. He offers us a hot shower in the middle of the desert and his kitchen wagon where we can stay for a night. And now at the Grand Canyon Caverns I meet with Roberts and Jony Phelan from Ringling, Oklahoma. They are the owners of a truck company. They make a stop over in Grand Canyon Caverns on their way to Las Vegas where they want to celebrate their 15th wedding anniversary. We meet during a guided tour through the Caverns. In the evening Robert and Jony invite me for dinner in the Caverns restaurant. They tell me that the encounter with me has led to a long conversation about how life will look after the “oil age”. They make their living with truck transports. And Roberts says he will become active when politicians will try to make their job difficult. Ringling is a small town with about 1000 inhabitants. It became known as the town where the famous circus Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey had its home base. The circus has been founded in 1884. A part of it were the side show freaks – they showed dwarfs, giants, people with malformations and unusual life stories – and here there is a connection to our Transatlantic21 adventure last year where we heard the story of Louis-Auguste Sylbaris in Martinique. He was one of the few survivors of the volcano eruption in St. Pierre, Martinique, in 1902. He was in prison because of drunken behavior. The thick prison walls protected him. For the rest of his life he was presented as one of the side show freaks at the Ringling Brothers circus because of his miraculous survival story. Ing and Chang from Siam were also side show freaks. And so I am learning from Robert and Jony how the expression “Siamese twins” emerged. We say good-bye with feelings of friendship; and I regret that Ringling is located so far in the south so that I cannot visit them there.

On Route 66 I walk from the Grand Canyon Caverns to Seligman. During the whole day I am walking along a mountain ridge – red-brown with olive-green bushes. Erosion has cut the slopes into segments, a harmonious repetitive pattern that shows the working design of the mysterious creative force. It has shaped caterpillars, cloud formations, sand patterns in a similar way. Between the mountains and the road there is a vast plain stained

by the yellow grass. Simple forms and colors: Yellow, brownish, greenish, and again - the blue sky.

1/30 – 1/31/2008

Seligman – Ash Fork – Williams

“That’s the man who walks through the country!” the cook tells the waitress when I enter the pretty coffee shop across the street, near the motel where I slept. And soon later the lady brings three huge pancakes, so big that I have to stop after having eaten 1 ½ of them. I ask for a doggie bag and fill it with the pancakes and with the toast that I didn’t touch either.

The next 12 miles of Route 66 – before the crossing with the freeway 40 – are so deserted: Only two cars are passing during the whole time, one of them a story in itself. The road belongs today almost entirely to me – and to John as I will find out soon.

Sunshine and flares of snow are taking turns. Sometimes I am walking underneath a huge blue hole in the cloudy sky. Then I see how the snow clouds surround some hills and cover them with fresh snow powder. Soon later I am in the middle of such a cloud; and the snowflakes are circling around me and James, my cart. Juniper trees are scattered through the desert. One of them attracts my attention. It’s big. Its branches are long and dense. The thought occurs to me: What an inviting tree to live in. I see something blue in the middle of the tree. I approach it curiously. “Hi, my friend!” a voice comes out of the tree; and then I see two clear blue eyes in a smiling face with curly hair and beard. The tree guy is looking out of his woolen blankets that are covered with a blue plastic tarp. “Wow, another man who walks! Good morning. Sorry that I disturbed you,” I say, and I go back to the road. I hook me up again to James and continue my hike. After a while I think of the pancakes and the toast in my backpack. I return to the tree. “Come here for a minute, it’s less windy here,” the tree man invites me into his juniper nest. “I am John,” he introduces himself. He comes from Iowa, he is on the road for a long time already, sometimes walking, sometimes hitchhiking. “The cold season is difficult. I don’t get around too much.” “You are also a free spirit?” “Oh, yeah.” His eyes are shining when he sees the breakfast and some money I give him. Before the road enters the hills I look back and see John’s tree once again, far behind in the plain, in the inhabited plain.

Before I reach the next basin a Jeep stops. “M. C. Story – Backhoe Services” I read on its door. “What stories are you transporting?” I ask the young man who comes out of his car with his camera. “Well, just my name.” Mark comes from Kentucky. He has lived in the wilderness for two years. He has built block houses. He invites me to connect with him when I’ll be near Lexington, Kentucky.

Today and tomorrow I am allowed – and forced – to use the emergency lane on the freeway 40. There is no other path or road that could bring me to Williams. Already in Kingman I inquired whether it’s legal to use the freeway 40 for 25 miles where there is a

gap in Rte. 66. After several phone calls the helpful lady confirms that it's possible, according to the officer Aaron Smith – permission for the biggest challenge so far: Truck after truck rushing against me and passing at full speed; endless uphill stretches; fumes, dead animals – a beautiful big owl – the wind moves the feathers as if it would like to revive its friend – two dead elks – their fur partially covered with snow – crows finding a winter meal. 25 miles compared with other stretches are not much; but after this flirt with the freeway I am so exhausted. I am very thankful to all the truck drivers who wave back. It gives me a little boost of energy, every time.

2/1 – 2/2/2008

Williams – Valle – Grand Canyon

The next two days heal the freeway trauma again. It's a wonderful hike from Williams to Valle, and then the next day from Valle to the Grand Canyon. I cover the 58 miles in two days because a heavy snow storm has been announced for Sunday, 2/3/2008.

The road cuts through big woods with pine and juniper trees – part of the Kaibab National Forest. The scent of the trees accompanies me during the whole hike. Again and again herds of elk can be seen. They are not very timid. They look at me, with beautiful eyes, the big ears stiff and upright; and then they jump elegantly away and disappear between the trees – their heads, ears, horns and the bright rear of their bodies can still be seen for a while between the branches.

I am hearing the bird before I see it – a rhythmic pumping noise; then I see its shadow passing me; and then I see the shining, black raven. It seems to follow me. I see it several times. It's always the same one. I recognize its small feather gap at its right wing.

Walking through the vast space during days changes the consciousness. I am not an observer anymore. I become a part of the landscape, a part of the endless plains, the mountains, the pine trees, and the sky. For hours I walk towards a mountain. It has the shape of an Asian bamboo hat – a dome in the middle, flat elevations around it. The dome is reddish-brown. The lower parts are green. Far away the north rim of the Grand Canyon can be seen as a narrow cliff ribbon. This grandiose landscape awakes deep feelings. I feel sadness thinking at my father. He was a geographer. He died 29 years ago, at the age of 90. I feel his presence, his joy seeing all that through my eyes. He knew a lot about this area and its geology, he even wrote textbooks about it; but he never saw this country with his own eyes. I sometimes hear him saying: “Fantastic” and I sense his enthusiastic awe; and I miss him very much. Or I feel the presence of my friend Bruno Manser who lived for six years with the native nomads in Sarawak, Borneo, where he disappeared eight years ago. Sometimes I hear his typical laughter if something funny happens or if I experience one of nature's miracles. The walking stick that he cut and decorated for me is always with me on my walks. I miss Bruno so much. I cry for a while facing the huge sky; and I am enjoying gratefully the depth and the intensity of these feelings – as an expression of our love and connectedness.

It seems to be the day when doctors meet, doctors who speak Russian: In the morning Mitch Sobczak serves me pancakes and hot chocolate at his Canyon Trading Post. He originally comes from Poland. He worked as a physician, also in Peru where his wife comes from. "Da svidanya!" he waves when I leave behind his restaurant and the row of huge trees in front of it. In the evening I meet Professor emeritus Horst Rupprecht, former chairman of the surgery department of the "Thuringen Kliniken Saalfeld-Rudolstadt" and his wife Siegrid. Horst has studied in Moscow for a year. They are part of a German tourist group that visits the US southwest for two weeks. Tomorrow a trip to the Bryce Canyon is planned. We meet in the store of the Chevron gasoline station in Valle where I buy some food. All the members of the German group are buying groceries there. I say to one of the ladies: "Nice to be able to speak German again after six weeks." "You can catch up on that during the whole night with me," this lady from Stuttgart is answering jokingly.

Also Rick at the reception of the hotel is confessing some of his dreams. We find out that both of us are "Libra", his birth date 10/11, mine 10/4. "Libra, these are the extremists. You dreamt to walk through this country, and now you do it. I dream to earn 1440 \$ a day, 1 \$ a minute. I will make that too. And I want to visit two places on this planet during my life time: Amsterdam, the Red Light District, and the Holy Places in Jerusalem."

2/3/2008

It's already getting dark when I arrive at the south rim of the Grand Canyon. The first snow flakes are falling. Since then a foot of fresh snow is covering everything. The snowstorm raged during the whole day on Sunday. Only the edge of the south rim can be seen in the mist. Spooky clouds dance around the holy place. The Canyon is a gigantic steaming pot.

I stay in the warm hotel room. I rest and write and watch TV – the debate of Hillary Clinton and Barak Obama, the comments regarding Super Tuesday. I admire both candidates, but my heart is with Obama. I believe he could be a leader who makes the political miracles possible we need so strongly in order to stop climate change.

I also see an ice skating championship – among the competitors Stephane Lambiel, the Swiss champion. For the first time I saw him at a hotel TV in Ankara on my walk to Jeruslaem in 2003. And here I see him again – matured, wonderful Flamenco energy. And I see also his competitor from Japan, Daisuke Takahashi. He dances the music of Prokofieff's "Romeo and Juliet". It's breath taking, deeply moving. I am feeling deep joy and awe – the oneness with the music, the perfect mastering of the body, the focused mind that governs the body, the sustaining concentration, the beauty that flows with every movement, out to the last fingertip – I experience in all that a joyful reflection, an enthusiastic resonance of the miracle of this planet and its inhabitants.

Another synchronicity: I ask myself where I can write my articles and reports. In the hotel there is no public computer available. The Public Library is closed because of the snowstorm. When I stand in front of the library – quite lost – a lady with a coffee cup in her hand offers her help. Joan Mavima works in the office of the National Park. “There is another library in the headquarters. Come with me.” And I can do all my “home work” there in a quiet office without any time limitation. Again, a helpful angel showing up, at the right place, at the right time...

I am closing with a big “Thank you!” from my heart to another helpful angel, Marcello Zandona, from Muenchenstein, Switzerland, who keeps my home page up to date with his excellent competence.