

## **Web Blog SUNwalk 2008 – engl. VI**

**2/6 – 2/12/2008**

Grand Canyon – Tuba City

2/6/2008

Grand Canyon – Navajo Point

Full of awe I am standing at the south rim of the Grand Canyon, after the snowstorm, on a wonderful clear morning. The fresh snow draws shining lines along the slopes in the upper third of the Canyon. I haven't eaten anything this morning; so the layers of the Canyon walls are reminding me of a huge puff pastry as we have it in my Glarus home state in Switzerland – the traditional "Glarner Pastete" – just coming out of the oven, freshly covered with powder-sugar.

My thoughts are wandering back to 1987: I am preparing a lecture on inadvertent nuclear war that I give for the IPPNW (International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War) in Auckland, New Zealand. I analyze man made catastrophes among them the sinking of the Titanic, the nuclear accident at Chernobyl and the chemical spill in Schweizerhalle near Basel. I realize: It's always a series of human failures that lead to these catastrophes, several incidents that shouldn't happen, not even a single one of them, but they can happen in a row; e.g. there were 14 failures that happened in a sequence, one after the other before the Titanic sank. At that time we conclude: A nuclear war can start inadvertently as the consequence of a series of human failures. Therefore we need the complete abolition of nuclear bombs; because if you have such gigantic risks involved the probability must be zero.

Looking into the Grand Canyon something similar comes to my mind – in a positive way: It has been a long series of miracles that made this awesome phenomenon of the Grand Canyon possible. I read in the Grand Canyon flyer the exciting history: "Tectonic plates move slowly across Earth's surface. Almost two billion years ago a plate carrying island arcs and the plate that became North America collided. Heat and pressure from this process changed those existing rock layers into dark metamorphic rock, the basement of the canyon. Molten rock then squeezed into cracks and hardened as light bands of granite.

Nearly horizontal layers of sedimentary rocks comprise the upper two-thirds of the canyon's walls. These rocks formed near sea level and at the edge of a continent. The remains of marine life accumulated on the ocean floor to form limestone. Rivers deposited sediments in swamps and deltas that then became mudstones. Dunes solidified into sandstone.

About 70 million years ago the Rocky Mountains began to form, pushed up as the North American Plate overrode the Pacific Plate. In the process a large section of what is now Utah, northern Arizona, western Colorado, and a corner of New Mexico rose from sea level to elevations of thousands of feet, forming the Colorado plateau. This uplift occurred with remarkably little tilting or deformation of the sedimentary layers. The stage was set for carving of Grand Canyon.” But it needed another big miracle – a big stream in the middle of the desert. “By five or six million years ago the Colorado River flowed across the Colorado Plateau on its way from the Rocky Mountains to the Gulf of California. Each rain washed sparsely vegetated desert soils into the river. A steep gradient and heavy sediment loads created a powerful tool for erosion. The river’s volume varied seasonally and over time. As the last Ice Age ended 12’000 years ago, the flow may have been ten times today’s volume. As the river cuts down, the canyon deepens. Tributaries erode into the canyon’s sides, increasing its width. Erosion carves faster into the softer rock layers, undermining harder layers above. With no foundation these layers collapse, forming the cliffs and slopes profile of the canyon.”

Before I continue my hike I enjoy the gorgeous dark buckwheat pancakes in the fancy restaurant of the El Tovar Lodge – the same kind I enjoyed already twelve years ago. At that time I made a 6-month Greyhound trip through the USA, from one promising future project to the other. It was a Saturday afternoon in February 1996, at 2 o’clock, when I arrived at the south rim of the Grand Canyon. I put my luggage into a motel cabin; and off I went: I dove down into the Canyon, running down the 5300 feet on the Bright Angels Trail. After a little bit more than two hours I arrived at the Colorado River. The sun was just setting. Dusk was conducting its enchanting play of colors - orange, red, gold, purple, and blue. I rested for a while, and then I started to climb up the canyon wall again. Elks were looking at me from behind the bushes at Indian Garden. Then the tiresome part followed – it was reckless to undertake this hike without water, only with two carrots and some olives in my pocket. When I ate them my stomach turned upside down. Slowly and steadily I walk up the path, 38 turns, always telling myself: “I’ll make it, I’ll make it”. I am completely exhausted when I arrive at 9 PM at the rim. I feel miserable and go immediately to bed. The next morning I wake up, fully recovered and feeling well. What a pleasure to eat the huge buckwheat pancakes in the El Tovar – such an abundance of food - I can take half of the pancakes with me in a doggie bag. Twelve years later a repetition of this gluttony – but this time I can eat the whole thing – great fuel for the next 25 miles.

The road Nr. 64 follows the south rim of the Canyon – again and again there are fantastic views opening towards the Canyon and the North Rim.

A tourist guide stops and asks me whether he can take pictures, on the cliff of the next viewpoint. He grabs James from both sides and carries the heavy weight down the flight of stairs, sneezing violently. And soon Lancelot joins us. When he sees us he takes his tripod and video camera out of his car in order to film the walker and James. He came from Hungary 14 years ago. He works now as a lung doctor in Phoenix. Soon we are speaking about common acquaintances in Budapest, the family Szentagothai – Katica is married to one of my school friends, Michael Bloch, in Muttenz, Switzerland: and the

family Bodoky – the Hungarian relatives of a good friend of mine, the minister Georg Vischer in Basel. Small world...

Again and again the wind blows snow like gossamer curtains across the street. The fine crystals sneak into the space between my soles and the sandals. They comfort the feet heated up by walking briskly.

In the late afternoon I find a well protected camping site, about 1000 feet away from the road, behind a thick juniper bush – I am not sure whether camping is permitted in the National Park area. Three times I stamp back and forth in the fresh snow until all my luggage is transported to the camping place, at first with the tent, the tarp, and the backpack, then with the heavy carrix bag, and then with James, the carrix cart. At the end there is a trail in the deep snow that will make my life easier the next morning.

The night is cold – about 10 degrees F; but the tent and the wonderful sleeping bag keep me warm. I think at Virginia and Allen, deeply grateful for this heart, soul and body warming gifts. It's wonderful to spend the night in the cold under the sparkling sky being so warm.

2/7/2008

Navajo Point – Little Colorado River Gorge

In the morning many rabbit tracks surround the tent forming a beautiful pattern in the fresh otherwise untouched snow. I have slept 12 hours. I carry the luggage back to the road, through the glittering morning snow field. A ranger truck stops. Am I caught? Because of illegal camping? "Are you OK? Do you need anything?" questions of a Good Samaritan who is ready to help a brother. Again and again I hear these questions of Good Samaritans who stop in order to be sure that I am OK.

The huge parking lots at Desert View are now empty, at this slow season. Behind them there is a restaurant, with a store and a watch tower. Two Native American couples serve the guests. One Indian woman asks me whether it was me whom she saw between Williams and Valle walking several days ago and waving to her. When she learns that I walk from L.A. to Boston she starts to laugh. She explains to the other people that I walk from coast to coast. All of them laugh and laugh and laugh. The word "walking" triggers new peals of laughter. At first I feel somehow embarrassed, made fun of. But then I think: "If something is healthier than walking it's laughing. What a privilege to provoke laughter in others. It's the best medication, for free."

The watch tower is an impressive example for PARKitecture. It was Mary Elizabeth Jane Colter who created beautiful buildings that are in tune with nature, architecture for National Parks. As an architect she knew a lot about archeology and anthropology. She used local construction material. She was including indigenous wisdom and handcraft design in her architecture. Before she started to build one of her projects she studied old

native ruins for months. She drew many sketches. In the Grand Canyon National Park she built three excellent buildings – the Hopi House (1913), the Hermit's Rest and the Watch Tower at Desert View (1932). The tower reflects her carefulness and competence – before it was placed every stone was chosen according to its shape and color. Therefore these walls fit very well into the landscape. They seem to be a part of it. Colter decorated the interior of the tower with Hopi furniture and art. From there I enjoy a last breathtaking view to the Canyon, down to the Colorado River which can be seen very well from here, and across the big plains and its dark hills.

At the first floor there is a shop with Navajo and Hopi handcraft. On a open fire a bundle of exquisitely smelling juniper wood is burning. A big, old man with white hair and beard and clear blue eyes is introducing himself as a friend of Joan, my „computer angel“ in the ranger headquarter. „This place fits you very well“, I say greeting him. „Yes, I think so“. There is also a short chat with a group of visitors from Graz, Austria. Later I regret that I greeted them with a joke about the provincial aspects of Graz: An oboist in the Graz Philharmonic orchestra always misses the high tunes. The conductor asks him with despair: “Are you really not able to play these high pitches?” “Oh, highly esteemed Mr. ‘Kapellmeister’ “, the oboist replies, “if I were able to play these high pitches I wouldn’t be in Graz.” “Let’s go”, one man of the group says with a sweet-sour smile...

Big, long curves, endless stretches – the road leads down to lower parts of the country. The snow melts, the temperature goes up. After a pass the view widens towards the East, the Painted Desert, the Moenkopi Plateau, the “mesas” of Hopi Land that I will cross during the coming days. The Little Colorado River has dug out a 1000 feet deep canyon, a meandering crack with sharp edges, like a bizarre crack in a house wall, after a landslide. Signs announce „Two scenic views ahead“. And really, it’s overwhelming – looking down into this deep abyss where the red-brown river is performing its patient etching, scraping work.

It’s not easy to find a camping palce. The slopes are still steep. Ther is barbed wire everywhere along the road. The ground is wet and muddy from the melted snow. I ask the universe for a good camping spot. And soon later I see a small twin tunnel, underneath a deserted road that parallels the new road. Arriving there I realize: The perfect place to camp. The tent fits exactly into one of the two tunnels. It’s well hidden there; and there is a splendid view towadrs east, towards the Little Colorado River gorge.

I put up the tent. Afterwards I regret for the first time that I have no camera with me. I decided to walk without foto or film camera in order to draw more, and to be free form constantly scanning the surroundings for good shots; but the small, yellow tent in the tunnel looks so cute, like a golden twinkle of an eye that expresses coziness and self-sufficiency at the same time. In the tunnel every noise is amplified manyfold – the sneezing, the noise of the zipper, the clapping sound when I close my diary, the sound of brushing my teeth – everything is quite tumultuous. The tunnel is also an efficient wind channel – the wind roars during the whole night; but inside the tent I am well protected, and I sleep deeply for almost ten hours, from 7 PM to 4 30 AM.

2/8/2008

### Little Colorado River Gorge – Cameron Trading Post

At 5 30 AM everything is packed, time to bring the luggage up to the road. This morning brings some surprises: James and the backpack are light, so I carry them up first; but in the dark I get lost, once again – and it takes quite a while before I find the road again, through all the rocks, cactuses, bushes. Well, I have learned for the second load. I take the heavy bag with its 45 pounds. It's more difficult to keep the balance in the rocky slope. I walk from rock to rock. Suddenly one of the stones is gliding. The heavy bag pulls me to one side, I fall, and – oh, no: I am landing in the middle of a prickly pear cactus! Fantastic how this plant protects itself against attacks. In a split of a second it releases hundreds of spines, bigger ones, smaller ones which drill themselves into the clothes and the skin of the other creature. I am reminded of the poor guy in Wilhelm Busch's drawing book who is thrown into a cactus by an elephant. Finally I know what he went through. My second thought: Wow, a new experience, and even one I can write about in my Web Blog. That comforts me a little, and I begin to pull the spines out of my skin and pants. There are all sizes, long, white needles with dark peaks – like the spines of a porcupine. There are also small ones, white and brown. The finest yellow-brown ones are the most attached ones, hard to find and hard to pull out; and if I pull them out they often like to reenter the skin of the finger. Soon I realize: Forget the trousers. Do that later, at daylight, with better equipment. So I put on my extra pants.

In the meantime dawn begins: There is a huge cloud formation in the east, a cloud trunk that sends out its branches to all sides – it covers four fifths of the sky. At first a hunch of light is crawling into this cloud mass above the horizon. Then a fine, red stripe separates the cloud castle from the Earth. The colorful ribbon gets broader and broader and stains the clouds more and more. The red color sneaks into the cloud branches; and there it is: „ροδοδακτυλος εως“, the rose fingered aurora that already Homer was delighted about. The cotton-wool blanket that the clouds form is now shining with a variety of bright colors – yellow, gold, red, orange, purple. It changes its form, it turns into waves of color. Some gaps appear, like erosion valleys, mountain trails, darker than the light colors. The cloud fan is shrinking, and the fine cloud fingers become thin and fine. They appear now like the curls of a red haired young woman. Suddenly this overture of the sunrise opera comes to an end. The remaining clouds are floating again, heavy, gray-blue, muffled. And behind them the sun rises – as a yellow-orange silent yearning.

I find a nice lodge in the plain, next to a new and an old bridge across the Little Colorado River, the Cameron Trading Post. The room is equipped with traditional Navajo furniture and decorated with Indian art. In the garden I can dry my laundry, thanks to a great laundry line. It's a very simple, ingenious invention: Two elastic strings twisted around each other, with two hooks at both ends (thanks, dear Peter and Esther for this wonderful gift!). The laundry can be fixed between the two strings. The clothes line can be suspended between all kind of objects – between a lamp and the bed, between curtain

rings and the TV set – or, in the garden of the Trading Post, between a sprinkler pole and a candelabrum...

I read about Debby in 1996. There was a chapter in a book about renewable energy describing the project „Native Sun“ that Debby has created. She learned to be an electrician in order to bring solar energy to Hopi villages. She installed far more than 100 installations. The Sun is important in Hopi tradition; and the solar cells made the native people energy self-sufficient, independent from the US grid.

During my bus trip through the USA in 1996 I would like to visit Debby in Hotevilla, Hopi Land. I inquire in Prescott, AZ, whether there are bus connections there – without success at that time. Therefore I want to rent a car; but I don't get one because I don't have a credit card. I tell the story to my friends Virginia and Allen in Monrovia. They offer to sponsor a trip for Debby to Basel, Switzerland so that she can present „Native Sun“ at the 1st international Energy Forum sun21 in 1998. Her impact is so impressive that we invite her for a second time in 1999. In 2001 I visit Debby in Hopi Land – this time with credit card and hired car, after 20 years of not driving ☺...

Debby tells me then that she will go back to school. In the meantime she studied Hopi culture and management. She works now as the Renewable & Tribal Energy Coordinator in the Arizona Department of Commerce. We meet in Cameron and celebrate our reunion. Debby offers me that I can stay with her family, mother Dorothy, father Richard and brother Michael, in Tuba City., She also invites me to a ceremony in Hotevilla on 2/16/2008 – a prayer dance for rain and fertility for the the upcoming seed-time. Therefore I decide to walk through Hopi Land.

2/9/2008

The road towards north leads through a bizarre moon landscape – on both sides of the roads there are grey-blue mounds, like monumental sculptures. Behind them there are the flat red-brown and yellow ochre „mesas“, the flat table mountains. Each time I take a break – for a drink, for a bite, for a pee – a car stops. Most of the time a native American couple offers me a ride. I thank them explaining that their offer warms my heart; but that I am walking from L. A. to Boston, and that I want to make this walk without using a vehicle. Others offer me a sandwich or a bottle of mineral water. „God bless you, brother“, the drivers usually bless me before we say good-bye.

Just before sunset a white camper pulls in behind me. A man and an woman get out of the car: „Martin!“ Gilberto calls me, and Doris follows. I exchanged e-mails with Gilberto and Doris Schaefer. They come from Basel, Switzerland. They are working in graphic design, for a while for Sundance. They live in the USA since 1971, presently in Salt Lake City. They are neighbors of Jody and Louis Borgenicht, also good friends of mine for many years. I met Louis in Helsinki in 1984 during a congress of IPPNW. John Schaefer, also a friend of Doris, Gilberto, Jody, and Louis, was photographer of Robert Redford.

He tried to involve Robert in sun21 for several years. John works with schools now, for a while teaching the conscious use of television, now in a nationwide program that empowers children and adolescents to use their creativity more. John and Gilberto came to Basel four years ago and visited the Carnival – that was the first time I met Gilberto.

Before we find each other, Gilberto and Doris look for me for a while. They inquire in the motels in Tuba City whether I have already arrived there. They also ask the police whether they have seen me on the road. At that occasion they announce to the police that I will walk through this area. They ask them to support me. And now we find each other, in the middle of the desert, near the Junction of Highway 89 and Highway 160.

Soon we are sitting around a fire behind one of the „moon“ mounds enjoying the sunset and the traditional Basel Carnival meal with which Doris surprises me: Flour soup, onion and cheese pie – two days before the big Carnival festivities start in Basel.

2/10/2008

Gilberto walks with me for a day, from the junction to Tuba City. Doris drives ahead with most of the luggage – I enjoy very much this Sunday walk – only with my backpack, without James for a change. At noon time Doris waits for us with great sandwiches and organic carrots. In front of the house of Debby's family we say good-bye, not for too long though...

2/11/2008

My harness has slipped down and disappeared between other things in the car. So I forget to unload it. When I realize that the next morning and look for the harness in my luggage with despair Gilberto and Doris just arrive again and bring the harness back to the happy horse...

Laura Slawney from 12news writes me already 3 weeks ago. She wants to make a film about my SUNwalk for the TV station in Arizona that works for NBC. Today Brandon and Steven come and make this show ([www.azcentral.com](http://www.azcentral.com) > “environmentalist crosses the U. S. in a solar walk”).

Tomorrow I'll start my walk towards Hotevilla, one of the “cradles” of America.

I get some good news, buds of hope:

Thomas Meyer was the designer of our solar boat sun21. He has, together with Stephan Wrage, founded then company SkySails in 2001. Now the first freighters are using these sails reducing the fuel consumption considerably. One of these freighters just has crossed the Atlantic and landed in Venezuela ([www.skysails.de](http://www.skysails.de)).

John Wenz was our co-skipper on the solar boat in the US. Before that he was evaluating motor yachts as a yacht expert. The time on sun21 changed his life. Now he wants to bring solar boats to the Hudson River (see Buds of Hope > Solar Boat on the Hudson River).