

Web Blog SUNwalk 2008 engl. XI

3/18 – 3/19/2008

Amarillo – Pampa, Texas

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Amarillo – Panhandle, Texas

Michael and Joshua are already waiting for me, five blocks after my start this morning on Ross Street. They belong to the team of the Amarillo Globe-News and report about my SUNwalk (see link).

Spring is coming silently, with small witnesses along the road: Tiny green cushions of cloverleaves appear between withered yellow grass and cotton wads. Very small dandelion leaves come out, and soon, after some hours of sunshine, the golden-yellow suns of their blossoms follow. Another little flower is also a pioneer of spring – a purple star of five small petals. Some parts of the road have been paved recently. There the asphalt surface sometimes bulges. At the peak of the small asphalt hills cracks appear, and fine green leaves break through the cracks to the light – how much they encourage me, these little leaves with their enormous life power! Cherry trees are rejoicing in their white eastern robes; and in the crowns of some trees a green dream is unfolding, is becoming reality.

In the middle of the huge plain I see a small tree surrounded by a paling fence. There is a historical marker that tells its story: Thadium (Thomas) Cree serves as a teamster in the civil war (1861 – 1865). Later he works for the Pacific Railroad. 1888 he and his wife come to the High Plains here in the Panhandle of Texas. There are no trees here – so they build a dugout home. Cree travels 35 miles – at his wife's request – in order to find a sapling. He plants it here. He waters it from a nearby lake that he digs out from a buffalo wallow. The tree never grows, but lives for many years, until the seventies of the last century, despite of blizzards, heat, and drought. 1963 Governor John Connally dedicates a historical marker to the first tree in the panhandle – “a good-luck symbol of settlers through drought, blizzard, and heat”. In 1990 residents plant a new tree as a memorial to this area's early pioneers – a meager, but tough, thorny little tree that I can see and enjoy now in the middle of the desert.

It's already dark when I arrive in Panhandle. It's called like that because there was the intention to make it the capital of the panhandle of Texas. But it comes differently. Amarillo has been founded and becomes the center of this area. Anyway – Panhandle remains an important railway station for freight trains.

Thanks to the cattle boom and, in 1926, the oil rush it becomes the busiest freight railway station after Chicago. But tonight it's quiet. There is one motel, the Double N motel, named after N-N, a powerful landowner in the beginning of the 20th century. At 9 PM I wake up the lady manager of the motel. "I am happy to be in Panhandle," I say, thinking at my late arrival here. "At least one person who is happy to be here", she smiles back.

3/19/2008

Panhandle – Pampa, Texas

After a good breakfast in the Las Palma's Restaurant I start my walk; but the waiter follows me, running, with his camera – then the whole kitchen crew arrives for a photo session.

Near the small, clean town of White Deer there is a wind farm with 75 wind turbines. In the center of town where the two roads are crossing a white deer stands on a high plinth. I enter the office of the "White Deer News": "Are you looking for White Deer News?" I ask the two ladies who are working there. "Here there is one." During our conversation I mention that I walk for the number one priority. I ask her what she thinks is this priority. In order to find out more about me, about my priorities she asks: "What kind of a doctor are you?"

A lady stops and offers me a bottle of mineral water. Then she gives me money for food. Looking back I see that she remains in her parked car for a while before she hits the road again. Twenty minutes later a big old Cadillac stops in front of me – the reporter of the Pampa News. The lady has called the local newspaper and announced my arrival in Pampa. A man stops his little truck on the other side of the road. He shouts through the traffic noise: "Hi Doc, I saw you in the paper this morning".

That's the perfect combination for spreading my message – hundreds, often thousands of people see this strange guy with his card on the road. He waves to them, four out of five wave back. They think: "Is he a homeless person; or does he have a cause for his walk?" And then they see the story in the newspaper or on TV, and they connect the encounter with the content of my walk.

I am reading on a sign about the big cattle drives to the north. It touches me because during centuries my ancestors in Elm hiked with their cows across several passes to the markets in Bellinzona in South Switzerland, and even to Milan in Italy. After 1880, many huge herds migrated from here to the north so that the animals gained weight on the pastures there. For the cowboys this was hard work – turning "stampedes", fording rivers and quicksand streams, fighting attacks and protecting the herds from cattle thieves - lot of challenges, hunger, and thirst. The last great Texas Panhandle Drive is organized here in White Deer

at the N-N headquarters, 100 cowboys, 10 herds of 2'500 animals – 25'000 beeves in total. It went to Montana, from April to September 1892. The cows belong to the Niedringhaus Brothers, German tinsmiths who put into ranching a fortune made in Enamel, Granite household wares. Later the territory belongs to the White Deer Land Company. In 1907 the land has been sold to smaller farmers and ranchers.

Near Pampa there are several refineries and many oil pumps. They stand in the landscape like big birds. They remind me of the hammer of the “hammering man”; but the hammer of the hammering man is still moving whereas the oil pumps here don't move anymore, for many decades already.

During the last few days, along route 60, I saw 41 dead owls, 37 of them barn owls, among them many young birds. Probably, they come to the road because of others dead animals there. They want to feed from them. Then they are blinded by the car lights and cannot fly away in time. I am so shocked by the great number of these dead beautiful animals. I write the Audubon Society, and I hope somebody follows up on this.