

## **Web Blog SUNwalk 2008 engl. XIX**

5/18 – 5/29/2008

Center Hill Lake, Smithville, TN – Mocassin Valley, VA

5/18/2008

Center Hill Lake, Smithville, TN – Sparta, TN

Once again a car stops. A man leaves the car, around 60, well dressed, white shirt, with a colorful tie. He wants to know why I am walking. It's Charlie. Sunday morning – at first I think he is a priest coming from the Sunday morning mass; Charlie is a retired salesman and gardener. He came back to Sparta because of his old father who needed his support. Now the father has died; and Charlie stays here in this town. "I am insignificant – but I try to bring some light into this world. I try to help where I am needed". He wants to invite me to dinner. We make an appointment at 6 o'clock PM at the reception desk of the Royal Inn in Sparta.

My accommodation in Sparta is not "Spartan" at all – a very nice hotel managed by an Indian family; many motels and hotels here are owned or managed by immigrants from India. It takes a while until I find the hotel at the outskirts of Sparta, well hidden at the northern slope of a hill. In Tennessee there is not only a town of Sparta; but also one of Athens. Fortunately the animosity between the two Greek towns hasn't lasted until modern times...

It's a pleasure to spend time with Charlie. We share a lot about our lives; I encounter in him an open-minded, generous, and gentle man, without "blinkers" and prejudices. He invites me to a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant. This fast-food chain is famous for its chicken products. The KFC houses can be recognized from far away by the head of the founder, the colonel Harland Sanders, who has given the KFC places to humankind half a century ago. I am surprised to find a rich salad bar – another option to find some good "fuel" for my hike...

After having said good-bye Charlie informs the local newspaper about the Sunwalk. The next morning a reporter waits for me in front of the newspaper building – and there is also a piece of a paper: Charlie has left a note and wishes me a good journey. Soon he shows up in person on his way to a meditation session at the senior citizen’s center, and we can continue our conversation over a rich breakfast at the downtown coffee shop; and I hope I could let him feel that I experience Charlie not as insignificant...

5/19/2008

Sparta – Crossville, TN

I am often reminded of the Jura Mountains in Switzerland when I walk through these Plateau areas in Tennessee: Big limestone plates appear on the surface of the meadows. Pastures, often with old trees, connect forests. Often curious horses are galloping towards me. Cows follow me towards east until the fence stops them.

I am hiking on the left side of the road – between two worlds: On the right hand side there is the bitumen ribbon of the road – roaring cars that rush by, waving drivers. On the left hand side there is the paradise with its abundance of beauty and colors. Some weeks ago there was nothing than yellow grass; now what a symphony of colors, forms, and scents. There are big cushions of blue “forgetmenots”. There are big daisy clans – the members with their white-yellow crowns float in the wind like well trained cheering groups. The poppies almost dazzle the eye with their brilliant red color. Lush curtains and blankets of honeysuckle with their white-yellow claw blossoms emanate clouds of sweet-exotic-befuddling scent. Often a rabbit runs away and hides in the bushes. It’s amazing how close to civilization the groundhogs (*Marmota monax*) live – I see them hiding from me in a gutter or disappearing behind some brush next to a parking lot. The “birdybirdybirdybirdy” of the cardinal fills the heart with joy – a red ray of beauty in the fresh green of mother Earth’s gala dress.

Soon before I arrive in a nice hotel past Crossville I feel thirsty. In that moment I arrive at a gasoline station. Mark Polaski leaves his old truck and asks me about my walk. “What drink can I offer you?” After a while he comes out of the convenience store and brings me the veggie juice I wanted. “Bob, the owner offers you also a beverage of your choice,” Mark says.

Such encounters teach me a lot about God, about sharing, about letting go of fears, and about the human potential that will keep our wonderful planet a paradise where also the coming generations can live in.

Some sentences I read on signs near churches make me smile:

“When born – broken  
God’s Grace is our glue”

And also some church mathematics:

“God adds and multiplies,  
Satan subtracts and divides”

And some words I discover near the Speers Ferry Church that concern the issue # 1:

“Gas is going up.  
Are you?”

5/20/2008

Crossville – Rockwood

It’s very hot today. I am walking uphill, downhill, uphill, downhill. It’s almost impossible to quench my thirst. Again and again I find a store and I can buy something to drink. In the last store Mike Russell pays my buttermilk and my sandwich. For a while we are sitting on the bench in front of the store and talk. The young, tall man does a lot of volunteer work. When I arrive in the valley after an hour of walking through the wood hills Mike waits for me and offers me some gifts: Fresh cold spring water, a small pocket bible, and a T-shirt.

5/21/2008

Rockwood - Farragut, TN

When I pull James uphill in the woods, gasping and sweating, I hear a mysterious symphony. The whole forest is sounding, a loud beautiful music I have never heard before. There is a monotonous melody that resonates through the whole wood hill. Sometimes there is a fizzling, rattling sound, rising and ebbing. What can cause this amazing music? Maybe frogs? Or birds? Insects? A lady works in her garden on the top of the hill. I ask her about the cause of the musicians that make these hills sing. "It's a kind of a locust that comes in millions and millions. They sing until they die." I like that!

Later I saw the animals and consulted the internet. It's a cicada that is related to the harvest fly. There are two main kinds of periodical cicadas in the United States. One kind spends 17 years as a nymph feeding on tree roots while living below ground, and the other lives underground for 13 years! Then each type, as if on some signal, emerges at the same time from the ground. They change into adults, lay eggs, and after a few weeks, they die. The cicada grows up to three inches. They have orange eyes, transparent wings with a yellowish net design. Once the female cicada comes above ground, she mates. Then she lays her eggs and dies. The cicada can lay four hundred to six hundred eggs. The adult cicada lives in trees. Adult cicadas live for thirty to forty days. A cicada can chirp so loud you can hear it from half a mile away. A male cicada abdomen has two drum like sound chambers.

When I approach the area of Knoxville I see suddenly the Great Smoky Mountains in the haze of the eastern horizon. They are a part of the Appalachian Mountains, this old mountain ridge that connects the north with the south of the USA. After my long walk through the continent I am deeply moved when I see the wood hills, in a similar way like when I saw the Pyrenees for the first time walking on the Saint James pilgrim's path through France. Now only these wood hills and a beach strip of land is separating me from the Atlantic Ocean.

It's getting dark. The walk to the hotel next to the freeway near Farragut, a suburb of Knoxville, doesn't seem to come to an end. I am exhausted. A car drives towards me and stops abruptly behind me. A man opens the door and follows me, running in the dark. "Do you walk out of health reasons?" he asks, gasping, when he arrives. "I saw you walking in the dark, and I was curious why you do that." Jeffery Jaeger lives in Wisconsin. He has roots in

Germany and Italy. He is so excited about my walk that he gives me 20 \$. And this energy boost gives me wings for the last mile.

I am often astonished to realize how much the mental aspect contributes to the fitness. When I am approaching my limits it needs only an inspiring encounter, an energizing song, or thinking at a beloved one, and the energy comes back. I experience these physical challenges in a similar way like a long fast. Also there I was aware that we don't live from "the bread alone", that we are far more than an engine, far more than a physiological being.

5/22/2008

Farragut – Knoxville, TN

An endlessly long, hot business road leads towards the center of Knoxville – official buildings, auto part stores, gasoline stations, fast food restaurants – mile after mile. A man stops his car on a parking lot and approaches me. Dick Helsel introduces himself as an engineer who works in technology that cleans up the environment. Soon he offers me to stay at his home. He draws a street map; and soon I am on my way there in the hot afternoon sun. The neighborhood becomes more and more beautiful; and after an hour I arrive in a wonderful residential area, a paradise of pretty houses, big gardens, many trees. In the shade red, purple and white azaleas, rhododendrons and lilies are in full bloom. When I find Dick's and Carol's house, the couple just arrives. There is a deep silence and peace in this place – I am not surprised that Carol and Dick offer here yoga meditation sessions. After a delicious and healthy salad meal and fresh strawberries we are sitting on the porch. David Ostermeier, a professor of forestry at the University of Knoxville, joins us, and we share visions and hopes. The next morning I leave Dick and Carol after some hours of deep and refreshing sleep, heading towards the center of Knoxville.

5/23/2008

Knoxville – Halls Crossroads, TN

I am having an appointment with the people of the Southeastern Alliance for Clean Energy at 11 o'clock AM. I believe the distance there is about 5 miles.

But after a while looking at the street numbers I realize it's much more, at least 8 miles. So I am running in order to live up to the Swiss reputation of being on time – at first again on the big business road with all its shopping malls, later through hilly residential areas with beautiful mansions and then through the historical center with quite old brick buildings, street coffee shops and parks. Thousands of young people have gathered in Knoxville for some days in order to reflect how to shape our future. I encounter many groups of young people walking from one event to another. The whole town is pulsating with joy and future.

In their Gay Street office I meet Gil Melear-Hough, the Tennessee Director of Renewable Programs, Jennifer Todd, the Fiscal Administrator, Brandon Blevins, the Wind Program Coordinator, and Cameron Potter, the Fiscal Director. The Southeastern Alliance for Clean Energy (SACE) has also offices in Georgia, in the Carolinas, in Florida, Kentucky, Mississippi, and in Alabama. Like we in Switzerland these people are promoting renewable energy and energy efficiency. They also try to stop projects of old, highly toxic technology like coal and nuclear power plants. The energy industry still wants to keep their central monopoly – and resources that are urgently needed for a clean energy future are wasted with the old polluting technologies. SACE is also encouraging individuals to become energy self-sufficient – on our path from energy monopoly industry to a clean energy democracy.

I walked towards east for months now. Today my route takes a turn towards northeast, into the hills and the valleys of the Appalachian Mountains, towards Washington D.C. At dusk I am looking for a camping site. In front of a big house many cars are parked. Some men are sitting next to the door, chatting. Behind the house there is a big lawn adjacent to the woods.

I join the men and ask what's happening here. There is an auction starting soon. Is it an auction of a house? All kind of stuff will be put up for the auction. When I tell them about my walk, there is a lot of sympathy for my cause. The director of the auction gives me the permission to use his property for my tent. Gerold, his step-son, brings me mineral water. He also invites me to diner – “on the house”.

While I am eating the fried onion rings and the mozzarella sticks all kind of useful and less useful stuff is sold by auction – bed side lamps in art nouveau style, tool boxes, a walking stick with a dirk in it, toy animals for the bath

tub etc. The auction leader rattles down the offered prices in a monotonous singsong: “twodollarfiftytwodollarfiftytwodollarfifty – threedollarsthreedollarsthreedollarsthreedollars”. His assistant walks around and looks for new bidders. If he finds one, he shouts with joy and points with his right arm to the new bidder. Gerold explains to me that auctions are very popular as a pastime activity here in this rural area. Before I go to sleep in the tent Gerold gives me his cellular phone number - “just in case, you need my help – we live just around the corner.”

5/24/2008

Halls Crossroads – New Tazewell, TN

In the afternoon a car passes me – on its door there is a sign “Cherokee Council Inc.” The car turns and stops behind me. A tanned man in his sixties with long grey hair introduces himself as Rick “Running Bear”, member of the Cherokee Indian tribe Ah, the bear that Rick announced me the day before! ☺. Rick saw me in the morning when he drove south. Now he saw me again, and he is concerned about my safety. Rick offers me a place to stay for the night. He wants to show me also his hill with the ceremonial sites. I gladly accept.

Because I don't take rides Rick drives slowly for about two miles on the emergency lane ahead of me until we arrive at his driveway. Around his house a lush garden with an abundance of flowers is blooming, dark-red poppies, peonies; a vegetable garden with bean sprouts, garlic, salads, and a big strawberry field; there is also an orchard with a lot of apple, pear and peach trees. Behind all that there is a big wood hill where Rick is realizing his dreams – a sacred hill with Cherokee ceremonial sites. Rick grew up in Oregon. He worked as a physical therapist. He married Carol, a Hawaiian woman with Chinese background. They have four children. Carol just left to visit their grandchild in Georgia. Although Rick is not 100 % sure, he is convinced that he has Indian ancestors. The Indian culture fascinated him always, and it felt very familiar to him. Today he is a member of the Southeastern Cherokee Council. He is the editor of a newsletter for this group that has its headquarters in Ochlocknee, Georgia. Rick would like to contribute his share for the preservation of the Cherokee traditions.

Rick gives me a tour around the hill with the ceremonial sites. He shows me a sacred place, an oval, even square with a central fireplace and with the signs of the seven main Cherokee clans - Long Hair, Blue Clan, Wolf Clan, Wild Potato, Deer Clan, Bird Clan, Red Paint. Another place in the wood shows the traditional medicine wheel, with a variety of rocks, gems and pebbles that have been placed in a traditional way. Rick dedicated a tree with three trunks to a heroine and two heroes of the Cherokee tribe – to the Nan Yehi, the “Beloved Woman”, to the “Dragging Canoe”, and to Oconastota, the chief of chota. Light and shade are dancing beautifully in the woods of this silent hill. I become aware: Not so long ago the Cherokees lived here in harmony with nature. During the next days I will pass an area where the settlers lived in 1748 - at the most remote outpost in the west at that time.

In the evening we are climbing a high hill from where we have a wonderful view to the sunset, onto the wood hills of the Appalachian Mountains – one ridge after the other. Down in the valley the Norris Lake reflects the colorful evening sky surrounded by lush green.

5/25/2008

New Tazewell – Sneedville, TN

Today I walk on a small idyllic road through the valleys and hills. There is practically no traffic. The sunlight is shimmering on the Clinch River – it must be one of the cleanest rivers of the country, with the highest biodiversity. I pass a small cemetery – no wonder in this green world that the last name of almost half of the people who are buried here was “Green”. From far away I see a young woman in a bathing suit pushing a canoe towards a house next to the Clinch River – it stands on high poles for flood protection. I wave, she waves back.

In the evening I arrive in Sneedville. In this remote village everybody knows everybody, and the latest news are propagated very quickly in town. On the parking lot next to the only motel some young women stand next to their cars and chat. One of them, with blue eyes, smiles at me and says flushing: “That was me who pushed the canoe towards the house.” She helps me to find the owner of the hotel calling him with her cellular phone – mine doesn’t have service in this hilly area. Doug soon arrives, together with his

alert 11 year old daughter. His father was a lawyer. His mother manages a furniture store next to the motel. Some years ago Doug bought the empty motel and revived it. "The room # 3 is very quiet," his daughter says, "and it has a refrigerator and a microwave stove." No surprise that this cute girl just finished the school year with distinction.

In the Pizza Plus Restaurant there is a huge variety of salads and pizzas, "all you can eat", for 4.99 \$. Ike Gibson, the retired social worker joins me at the table and asks me about my walk. After he left not only my ticket has been paid already. The waitress calls me also to the restaurant phone. Ike has informed Janet Cose from the "Hancock County Today", the local newspaper. We will meet at 6 30 AM tomorrow at "Hardeys" for breakfast.

5/26/2008

Sneedville – Clinchport, TN

When I leave Sneedville I suddenly hear a voice: „Come here, I am waiting for you!“ On a small hill there is a house south of the road. On the porch an old man is sitting, covered with a big gray blanket. He tells me that he got up early. He didn't want to miss me. Doug, the motel owner, has called him and told him my story. „I wanted to get to know the man who walks across the USA. I am 87, my name is Turner.“ The lady who is nursing the old man has joined us: „Everybody calls him ‚Sunny Turner’!“

All kinds of people find together in the restaurant at the next road crossing – motor bikers, drivers who explore this amiable hill area, farmers, forest workers, biologists who make research about the biodiversity of the Clinch River – it's especially famous for its big variety of mussel species (29 species) – and rarely enough a hiker... The restaurant is managed by the members of a Nature Conservancy group that is working for the preservation of this unique river area.

After some miles, at a small hamlet, a green sign announces that I enter the State of Virginia – the 8th state that I cross on my walk after California Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Tennessee.

A small red pickup truck stops: The strawberry man. On the passenger seat and on the loading surface there are boxes filled with fresh strawberries. He

offers me one berry – it's very sweet, and it has a wonderful flavour. It reminds me of the strawberries we had in our allotment when I was a child. I crave for another strawberry. But when I want to ask him for a second one he has already left. Soon later he drives back and stops again. Ah, the second strawberry; oh no – but he tells me that a member of his family, Steve Danell, is an enthusiastic walker too. He just has finished a hike on the Appalachian mountain trail from Georgia to the Smoky Mountains. I will pass his house soon. After some steps I see Steve coming down from his house, with a cold drink and an energy bar. We share about our adventures for a while. He intends to walk the whole Appalachian Mountain trail up to Maine (2175 miles). „Birds of the same feather, flock together“ – the walkers meet...

I camp at the river bench of the Clinch river, near Clinchport. As soon as I have put up the tent and washed myself and my laundry, there is a heavy thunderstorm. For the first time on my walk since the snowstorm in Hopiland I have to pack my wet tent the next morning.

5/27 – 5/29/2008

Clinchport – Mocassin Valley, VA

For quite a while I walk along the busy four-lane highway 23 until Ken, a family doctor from Bristol, VA, stops. He offers me mineral water, and he suggests that I use a quiet two-lane road that also leads to Gate City. Soon I meet Sam. In his garden he cleans my dirty tarp with his water hose. I can also take a shower and shave. In the meantime the tent dries in front of his house.

In Gate City I can read and answer my e-mails in the Public Library. When I walk through the little town Rex McCarty invites me from the street into his newspaper office. He is the editor of the local newspaper, and at the same time delegate of the Democratic Party. He will also be in Denver when the presidential candidate will be elected in August. His wife, also a newspaper owner, joins us later. Discussing with Rex I describe to him the huge opportunity I see for the USA embracing a new energy policy with 100 % renewable energy and energy efficiency.

There is a perfect constellation right now: The # 1 issue in the US public today - the rising gas prices. The US economy is in crisis. The fossil fuels have lost their innocence for a long time and (except coal) are running out. The USA could discover the huge potential of an energy system that depends fully on renewable energy and energy efficiency.

The USA could initiate a gigantic project that exceeds all big projects of the past – the “New Deal”, the Manhattan Project, the Marshall Plan, the flight to the moon. It will include the construction of energy efficient houses and apartments that harvest more energy than they need, a modern public transportation system combined with clean short-distance traffic, consequent sustainability in the whole production process, promotion of a healthy Earth compatible lifestyle, solar water heating, solar, wind, tidal and wave energy for the surplus electricity that is needed. The USA could become a leader in this urgently necessary energy evolution. The rest of the world will follow. Millions of new jobs will be created, jobs that make sense. The economy can recover. Resources will become available that are needed to keep the soil fertile, to have a human health care system, to improve education, and to end poverty (see also the film “Inside Green venture Cap...” that has been shown in Earth Forecast at the Weather Channel: <http://climate.weather.com/video/?clip=10551>).

Rex connects me with other people: With Steve Brook and Maxine Kenny. They live near the top of a wood hill in a remote beautiful house in the Mocassin Valley, 7 miles from Gate City. “You have to meet Maxine and Steve– they are tree-huggers and involved in the same areas like you are.” Soon Maxine arrives at the office and invites me to their place.

Rex calls also Laura Lee, the assistant of the Virginia Congressman Rick Boucher in Abingdon, VA. Boucher is the Chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee's Energy and Air Quality Subcommittee. “You must meet him and share your visions with him.”

After 1 ½ hours I arrive at the Mocassin Valley. Steve wants to pick me up; but I walk up to their hill. Fortunately - I would have missed one of the most beautiful stretches of my whole trip – the river, a bright shining mirror in the dark woods. Two deer look at me and disappear in the brush, wiggling their long white tails. High up there are two clearings, one with the house where Maxine’s 102 year old mother lives, even higher up the cozy white house of Maxine and Steve that they share with two dogs and four cats. Behind the

house there is a wonderful garden, full of flowers, vegetables, and strawberries. I can stay with them for two nights and a day. I sleep in an open cabin that Steve has built. We have a lot of stories to tell, about their activities for peace and for Mother Earth. They declared a big piece of land that they own as a protected area.

They have a friend who lives near Granny D(oris Haddock) in New Hampshire. Granny D walked also through the USA, at the age of 89. Her concern was the loss of democracy because of big money. Maxine finds out that she is well, at the age of 97. I would like to meet Granny D at the end of my walk, as a highlight and closure.