

Web Blog SUNwalk 2008 engl. XV

4/10 – 4/18/2008

Fort Smith – Beebe, AR

4/10/2008

Fort Smith, AR

The storm has passed. The hail has melted. The fresh leaves, the bushes, and the flowers are scattered all over. The evening is mild. The sun shines again and starts to heal the damage the storm has caused. I walk on Rogers Street towards east looking for some nice dinner. In front of a small building there are many parked cars – a good sign for the Chinese restaurant that is located there. A Chinese family is running it for 24 years already – the father is the cook, the mother and the son are serving the guests. At the next table there is a couple with three adolescent children, two girls and a boy. I see the man's back. He wears a hat. He is talking – a monologue. First I think what family dynamics - only the “patriarch” speaking. The others are listening very attentively. But then I realize: He is giving a presentation, like a rehearsal. At the end they applaud him. Before they leave the restaurant I ask him whether he is a teacher. Steve Hunter is nature photographer. He is preparing the publication of a photo book with pictures of nature miracles. He has presented a speech to his family with which he wants to ask sponsors and people who will help to make the book for support of his project.

Another elder couple listens when I explain Steve and his family my SUNwalk The lady later introduces herself and tells me a story: They traveled once in Alaska – a guided tour in the area of the Mount McKinley National Park. The bus had a breakdown. She decided to walk ahead until the bus was repaired and passed her again. It became one of the deepest and most beautiful experiences of her life. There was so much beauty everywhere, the endless tundra, and the big sky. “Never in my life I felt so close to God like then.”

4/11/2008

Fort Smith – Mulberry, AR

The tornado has stroke down several poles along the road. A construction team with heavy machinery has started to plant new poles. Some workers in plastic helmets are taking a break next to one of their big Caterpillar machines. They beckon to me. They open their cold box and give me a bottle of cool water. The road is closed – no traffic: It's perfect for hiking.

Before Dyer there is a small motel. I almost check in there although it's still quite early; but there is only a smoking room left; and it smells so badly that I continue to walk. Luckily: In the evening I find one of the most idyllic camping spots so far: The Mulberry Little Creek, a picturesque river is flowing in meanders between marvelous old trees. On both sides of the creek there are vast meadows surrounded by forests, fresh green veils. I put up my tent – far enough away from the road - nobody sees me, and I don't hear the traffic noise. The one opening of the tent faces west, the other one east. In the evening I see the sunset. In the morning I can enjoy the sunrise and the glittering light on the river. During the night the moon illuminates my tent with a soft blaze, and Orion – between the moon and the horizon - turns the landscape into a familiar soul chamber.

Each state I come through has its own character. I experience California as a variety of seacoast, wood hills, and desert. Arizona's colorful stone formations, canyons, and the landscape "altars" of the mesas leave deep memory tracks. New Mexico's "High Desert" stands out because of its wind, vastness, scantiness, and desertion. In Texas I experienced the immense treeless plains. Oklahoma with its rolling hills, bushes, and tufts was the upbeat for Arkansas, the "Natural State" with its abundance of woods and old trees that form majestic crowns. I am grateful that I can witness spring here.

4/122008

Mulberry – Ozark, AR

In Mulberry, in a small restaurant, I eat a delicious vegetable omelet for breakfast. The small room is packed with men from the village,

with baseball caps. They are vernacular. I have difficulties to understand their Southern accent. There is a lot of joking, a lot of laughter. These men remind me of the native people in Elm, in the Swiss mountains – a similar atmosphere.

In Ozark I check in to a motel, quite early in the afternoon. Joan, white haired, a generous, friendly lady, installs her private computer in the lobby so that I can work there. Talking to me she repeats my name often – I feel welcome, and I experience a good connection. Near Ozark there is the Ozark National Forest – evidently a beautiful nature area. Maybe, some day I will be back to explore this part of Arkansas.

4/132008

Ozark – Clarksville, AR

Blue mountains in the south – among them Magazine Mountain, the highest point in Arkansas (2753 feet). In Altus there are wineries and also an “Altus Daffodil Project” – it’s an attempt to bring back daffodils to the meadows around Altus. “Wiederkehr Village” – I think at a friend in Switzerland, Roland Wiedekehr, the founder of the “International Green Cross”, and his wife Marianne.

The road goes uphill, downhill, uphill, downhill. At noon I get hungry and thirsty; and I experience how that can influence the perception. There is a sign: “Moon - Veterinary Clinic” – at first I read: “Moon – Restaurant Open” ☺. In front of a church there is another sign: “There are some questions that can’t be answered by Google.” I sit into the grass next to the road in order to write down this sentence; and I see a miracle that illustrates it. There are fantastic small tender blossoms on long stems all around me. They are composed of five purple flower parts surrounding a white papilla with purple lines, and a very fine, tiny skid at the rear end of the blossom. Why this amazing beauty?

Angelus Silesius (Johannes Scheffler, 1624 – 1677) writes some lines about that:

“The rose is without a ‘why?’ It is in bloom because it is in bloom. It’s not aware of itself and doesn’t ask whether it is seen.”

Human words cannot describe the beauty of the flower splendor here. First the redbud trees opened their purple blossoms, now the dogwoods and azaleas turn the backyards into colorful symphonies and poems. A clover species with purple conical blossoms forms noble flower carpets.

4/14/2008

Clarksville – Russellville, AR

The Arkansas River becomes a big lake, the Lake Dardanelle. A bridge of Route 64 crosses a branch of the lake. It’s escorted in the north by the I-40-freeway bridge, very busy, in the south by the railway bridge, silent rails. Swallows are whizzing around the bridge, at the same height like my eyes – a migrant “bird” among migrant birds. On the other side of the bridge the hoarse barking of a chained shepherd dog cuts through the noon heat. On both sides of the lake there are hills covered with brindled forests, dark green firwoods, light-green deciduous trees.

A biker stops. I want to shake hands with him. He presents his fist. Fist against fist, knuckles against knuckles – greeting ritual among buddies. He is taciturn. He has a beautiful, natural face and green-gray eyes – I saw such eyes before, on a picture of an Afghan woman in the National Geographic. “How far to the state line?” “About 70 miles.” “Wow, so far.” “Martin.” “Mercy.” A smile. “From Little Rock to Oklahoma. - Good day! Be safe!” He takes off. I look back. Mercy waves - for quite a while.

A car approaches, with two flags in front on both sides – “Oversize Load”. A truck follows with a house on its trailer. The load is broader than half of the road. Strange if “immovables”, real estate are disappearing behind the next bend.

The road crosses the woods like a stripe of corrugated iron – downhill, uphill. And at the lowest point there is always a brook that passes under the road.

I like to sit down on the warm asphalt - heated up by the sun, solar energy that is not tapped here otherwise. I didn't see a solar installation for weeks. But there are more and more commercials that promote "clean" nuclear energy. It's also pretended that it will increase the energy self-sufficiency in the USA! Still much work to do, still a long way to go...In London, AR, there is a nuclear power plant, not far away from the center of town, in the woods. It's a small London – a population of 925 people; but not without some eminence: "2006 – Volunteer Community of the Year". I am now in Pope County, shortly before the arrival of Pope Benedikt in the USA. There are also red cardinals flying around in the bushes...

4/15/2008

Russellville – Morrilton, AR

A dream with Bruno Manser: He has created a beautiful old clock. He constructs it after an antique original clock, without opening or damaging it. He then surrounds the clock with a decorative purple sandal. He loses this piece of art. I find it in a puddle under a car.

Shortly after Russellville there is a sign "Morrilton 13 miles". I am surprised because I thought it's a stretch of about 24 miles between Russellville and Morrilton; and I didn't walk yet very far. After two hours I ask in a store in Atkins how far it is to Morrilton: "About 14 miles." I ask the lady about the 13 mile-sign. "Oh, yeah," she says, "this sign is there for years already; and it's just wrong."

The trunks of two giant trees are lying next to a farm. My first reaction: Why did they cut down these wonderful old trees? Two guys with a tractor are working on a field. I ask them about the trees. "The tornado uprooted them."

Often there are Monarch Butterflies flying around. Amazing creatures: They migrate in the fall to south California or to Mexico in order to spend the winter there. They can fly up to 200 miles a day. In the water ditches next to the road there are oval shadows moving forward – turtles. Sometimes there are also small mud towers with a central opening – crayfish are adapting their underground habitat to the water level in that way.

4/16/2008

Morrilton – Conway, AR

Many encounters and conversations concerning my SUNwalk: With Eric in the hotel lobby. He is a specialist for gas pipelines and tries desperately to find an air compressor in the area; with two ladies who sell artificial flowers on the street for Memorial Day. They want to know many details about my walk; with Joe: He runs out of a liquor store and brings me a bottle of cold mineral water: “Are you fucking serious,” he asks, when he hears about my walk. With James Clifton. He sits down with me on a bench in front of the supermarket. He tells me with his broad southern accent about his war experiences in the Far East. On the registration plate of his car there is a parachute sign and the word “airborne”. Twice he jumped with his parachute behind the enemy lines in the Korean War; “Not too many fumes on the road?” he asks thoughtfully. With Jennifer at the hotel reception: “I am proud of you!” when she hears about my hike ☺. Again and again surprising encounters, heartwarming conversations, exclusively positive reactions.

4/17 – 4/18/2008

Conway – Beebe, AR

What bliss – a day of rest with Linda and Charles Stone, near Beebe. I got the address from Mary and Felix Garcia in Willard, N.M., who gave me shelter during a snowstorm. It was also a snowstorm that brought the Stones with the Garcias together. In 2006 Linda and Charles were also hit by a snowstorm near Willard and could also stay with Mary and Felix. Linda and Charles welcome me in their house trailer in the woods – a paradise. Looking outside I see the trees turning green. Cardinals, woodpeckers and blue jays are dancing around the birdhouses in the garden; humming birds are hovering around the bushes. Linda works as a supervisor of land surveyors in the state of Arkansas in Little Rock. Charles has an own business for car repair. Their daughter Kathrine studies at the college in Conway. Cody, a Dalmatian dog, two cats, and a cockatoo belong also to the family. What a joy – a healthy vegetable and tofu dinner, a good night’s sleep and a day of resting and writing while outside some thunderstorms are passing through.

Heidi Hirt – she lives with her partner Martin Stutz in my wood house in the Bernese hills – sends me this Irish blessing – thank you so much, Heidi:

Beannacht

On the day when the weight deadens on your shoulders and you
stumble,
may the clay dance to balance you.
And when your eyes freeze behind the grey window and the ghost of
loss
gets in to you,
may a flock of colours, indigo, red, green and azure blue come to
awaken
in you
a meadow of delight.
When the canvas frays in the curach (irish boat) of thought and a
stain of ocean
blackens beneath you,
may there come across the waters a path of yellow moonlight to
bring you safely home.
May the nourishment of the earth be yours,
may the clarity of light be yours,
may the fluency of the ocean be yours,
may the protection of the ancestors be yours.
And so may a slow wind work these words of love around you,
an invisible cloak to mind your life.

