

Web Blog SUNwalk 2008 engl.

4/19 – 4/25/2008

Beebe, AR – Memphis, TN

4/19/2008

Beebe – Searcy, AR

„The Horse Thieves from Arkansas“ was one of the first books that I read as a boy with enthusiasm. It contributed to the fact that I became a bookworm. But the horse thieves seem to have disappeared, together with the stagecoaches and the steam locomotives. In Beebe people don't steal; but they give away, they bargain, and they trade.

Two teenage boys wave to me, quite desperately, from the other side of the road. They are standing next to three mattresses. On a sign they have written „Free Mattresses!“ They complain to me that they are here already for a couple of hours. And nobody so far is interested in their mattresses. They beg me to take at least one mattress with me. I wish I could help them...

In the outskirts of Beebe there is bustling activity. A big Saturday flea market takes place. Crowds of people are floating between the ware stands. They buy all kind of stuff – junk, clothes, food, dishes, china, crockery, food, and also squeaking piglets – they seem to have a premonition what will happen to them.

What a contrast - silence. There is almost no traffic on the rural highway. It leads through marshy woods. There is a beaver lake – dead trees stick into the blue sky like bizarre polished lances. It's hot. I get thirsty. In the small village of McRae there is a multipurpose building standing next to the road, near a trailer park.

The main door is open. The rooms are empty. I find a drinking water fountain with cool water in the hallway. I use also the rest-room. And I wince a little when a tall, big young man also shows up there – TJ, Tom

John. In the empty big hall he opens two folding chairs. He asks a lot of questions about my SUNwalk. His next destination will also be Boston. He was recently elected as the chief caterer of the Berkely School of Music. He will move to Boston soon. Tonight he will celebrate his farewell party in this hall with his friends.

When I arrive in the next town, in Searcy, I see a big furniture store. In the gloomy showroom an elder couple is sitting on a sofa waiting for customers. Both of them look sad as if today nobody had entered their store yet. Finally somebody shows up – and asks whether there is a hotel in town...

4/20/2008

Searcy – Augusta, AR

I often think at my missing friend Bruno Manser. The hazel cane he carved for me travels with me on James, my cart. When I see the big variety of birds or a snake that has been killed by a car I know what Bruno would do: He would study the animal, examine it carefully, he would draw it, he would like to find out everything that's known about this creature. Bruno wouldn't walk on highways. He was so strongly attracted by untouched nature. He wanted to explore landscapes that were new to human feet. He avoided roads and trails; and nevertheless – Bruno walks with me. He is often so present during this adventure.

I often encounter death on the road. There is a skunk – all that's left from it is a ball of fur. Again and again I see dead armadillos, these strange animal that look like fossils, that like to nuzzle in the ground with their long noses. They don't recognize threats – so they don't have any chances on the road. Or I see a deer – with nothing left of his body than some bones and some fur, almost completely withered, entered back to nature. And nearby I see the overwhelming abundance of new life that spring creates. In only a few days all the fresh leaves have come out. Where some weeks ago yellow straw has covered the ground there are lush meadows with blue sultan flowers and many-coloured blossom carpets.

Before Augusta the land is flooded. Houses are standing in the water – it looks as bizarre as the house that disappears behind the next road bend. The road is located on a dam. Cars have been parked next to the road and wait

there until the flood is over. The turtles seem to like the abundance of water. There are dozens of them that stick their heads out of the water. When I come closer they plunge and disappear as oval shadows.

The young African American lady in the convenience store gives me a key for a motel room. She also bakes a delicious veggie pizza with a thick layer of vegetables and cheese although the restaurant and the kitchen are already closed.

4/21/2008

Augusta – Wynne, AR

It's a joy for me if I hear that my walk encouraged people to do own steps. Curtis and Jo Miller from Sayre write:

Hi Martin,

Thought I'd say hi and let you know that we enjoyed your short visit with us. We are following your trip on the internet. Saw you in the Oklahoma City news paper with your friend from Boston walking with you. We've been reading your journal and enjoy your stories. Also, wanted you to know that you have inspired me (Curtis) to get walking again. I used to walk about four years ago but had stopped due to hurting my foot. Jo has been walking some for the last 3 months. Seems like your meeting alot of good people along your trip. Hope you pass along to your friends that Americans are Ok!

Curtis and Jo Miller from Sayre, Oklahoma

Thank you so much, dear Curtis, dear Jo – also for yor rescue feed!

The beautiful spring weather brings out some new challenges: Much poison is spread onto the land. Already in the morning a community vehicle sprinkles the grass next to the highway with herbicides. Around noon I see a yellow plane that sprays yellow clouds of chemicals onto the huge fields – back and forth.

In addition a huge spiderlike machine with high wheels sprinkles another acre with a herbicidal liquid. Again and again the wind carries clouds of sweet chemical smell towards me. There is strong protest in me. How can we dare to spread so much poison, to harm so many creatures? No wonder that researchers find high levels of chemicals in the blood of children here in the USA – there is a show at CNN right now - „Planet in Peril“ - in which this fact just was mentioned. There is one comfort for me: That we live in a transition time; that it was even worse in the fifties and sixties when DDT was sprayed all over the country. We are preparing a time with respect for all life forms, in responsibility for all generations that will come.

Human encounters have a healing effect too: A pickup truck stops. The driver introduces himself as Bill, a farmer. He plants soybeans, wheat, and corn – probably also with pesticides. On his baseball cap it's written „Marine Corps“. He shows an enthusiastic response to my walk. Then he shares his experiences in Vietnam. He was shot – both legs, belly. It's a miracle that he survived, that he can work as a farmer again. He gives me a 20 \$ bill – „for a nice dinner“. A short encounter, and a good antidote against the poison.

A sign in front of an „Assembly of God“ church says: „Life is short, pray hard!“

4/22/2008

Wynne – Marion, AR

I feel a strong pull towards east. I cover big distances – yesterday 33 miles, today 37. I can experience again and again how even short, heart warming encounters give me energy; e. g. with Steve Miller. He offers me a ride. I thank him and tell him that I don't accept rides. He expresses his respect and enthusiasm for my walk in such a sympathetic and open way that it gives me a boost of energy for the next hiking hours. Soon later Joe stops, a reporter from Wynne. Steve has called him and suggested to him to make a story with me. We are having a good conversation, and that gives my hiking another fresh impetus. I also become often aware how singing and poems recharge my „batteries“. Especially towards the evening I sing and cite poems during the last most difficult miles of the day. It makes also a big

difference whether I have slept enough and eaten sufficiently and healthily. If these conditions are not fulfilled the hiking becomes more strenuous.

23.4.2008

Marion, AR – Memphis, TN

What a large river, the Mississippi, and presently even larger because of the flood. It flows through the trees on the flooded river bench like wild hair that is combed through. I met the Mississippi twice before, in 1972 in Wisconsin, and in 1982 in New Orleans.

Slowly the brown water masses are moved from the north to the south. I see on the map that two freeway bridges cross the river. I am told that there is a lane for pedestrians on "The Old Bridge". This lane has exactly the right size for me and James. It's hot, 89 degrees F. I cross the flooded areas and the river – in front of me I see always the skyline of Memphis. The houses become bigger and bigger. More and more details can be seen. Underneath the bridge the river is flowing. A little boat tries hard to overcome the current. On the bridge there is a constant flow of cars and trucks. I put ear plugs into my ears in order to protect me from the roar of the traffic.

Memphis – the town where Martin Luther King was assassinated on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel 40 years ago; Memphis the town where Elvis Presley built up his Graceland paradise; and Memphis – for me the gate to the east. I experience the Mississippi as the Rubicon, the point of no return of my walk.

At the end of the bridge I leave the freeway – and get lost. I look at the map, and I think I can cross the city in about two hours – I am still used to European dimensions. My destination is the Memphis Hilton – thanks to my good connections with Urs Hitz, former General Manager of the Basel Hilton, and Petra Ramskogler, his assistant who coordinates my stay at the hotel, I get a good hiker rate.

Instead of two hours I need six of them. I get lost in a neighborhood of Memphis where I don't see any people on the road. Drivers usually don't stop if I wave to them in order to get some information from them. Therefore I have no choice than to enter an office - this time the headquarters of the oil company "Lion Oil". I ask the general manager which would be the best

way to the Hilton. He knits his brow. He says that I am here in a neighborhood where one should avoid walking on the street. He demonstrates me on a big map that is glued to the wall what would be the best route through downtown to the east side where the Hilton is located. He is friendly, and he offers me cold water although our activities are situated at the opposite side of the spectrum.

The walk is long and hot; but it has wonderful stretches. At the Central Street one after another impressive mansion is lined up – brick houses with white columns and antique friezes, classicistic stone palaces, and also some fancy modern buildings. The gardens are huge, the azaleas glaring red and white like bridal gowns. The most impressive part of it: the gigantic old trees. The mighty trunks rise like Gothic columns into the lush green crowns.

Shortly before I arrive at the hotel I pass the big Memphis Memorial Park, a big cemetery. There is an entrance with a roof and two stone benches – a perfect spot to replace my shabby shorts by pants and to cover my dusty feet with socks. I just have taken off my shorts when the garden gate opened. After my experience with the sheriff I wince quickly; but it's not a punitive censor, no, it's "Stein" (first name pronounced with a sharp S). Stein works as a freight pilot. He has jogged in the cemetery and is returning now to the hotel in order to prepare himself for a night flight to Birmingham, Alabama. "My wife will get out a kick out of your trip," he says and asks me for a card with my web site addresses.

For several days now there is a new web site: www.sunwalk2008.com. John and Gilberto Schaefer from Salt Lake City have made a great effort to build up this home page, mainly for my work with schools and communities. Soon I will have two signs at my cart and also a blue-yellow T shirt with the website addresses.

My hotel room is situated in the 25th floor. There is a fantastic view towards east, with a lot of green. The curved surface of the planet can be seen. I usually walk 23 floors up and down – a good exercise. The 24th and 25th floor are not accessible from the staircase. The staircase is very modest – grey stairs, dusty pipes with paint that is peeling off. Of course, there are not many people who use the staircase although it's one of the healthiest and most efficient exercises to go upstairs. This part of the hotel is not designed to be used, to be inviting. It reminds me of the US railway system. Its

infrastructure is in pretty bad shape. There is a huge potential for improving places and installations that provide energy efficiency and health such as staircases, sidewalks, bike trails, and public transportation.

I will enjoy Memphis for two days until the walk goes on, towards Nashville, Tennessee.

On my way to the library I discover a great supermarket with a lot of organic food products. A symphony by Mozart welcomes the clients. After weeks without organic food I buy a lot of fruits, carrots, and salads. Such a health oasis is a joy after the pesticide shock.

The “Alliance for Climate Protection” becomes active. There are more and more TV commercials – among them two films with well known personalities: Nancy Pelosi (Democratic Speaker of the House) and Newt Gingrich (former Republican Speaker of the House) are sitting on a sofa – in the background the dome of the Capitol in Washington, D. C. They agree: Efficient measures for climate protection need a number 1 priority. In the next film the two Baptist reverends Al Sharpton and Pat Robertson are sitting on a leather sofa at the beach, behind them the sea and the sky. Al Sharpton is an African American radical Civil Rights activist, Pat Robertson a conservative TV preacher. They also agree that climate protection has to become the number one issue: “The *right* thing to do,” Robertson says. “There you are again” Sharpton is joking, in connection with Pat’s political right positions.

In the CBS news there is a report about CRAG (Carbon Reduction Action Groups). The first CRAG group has been formed in England. People come together in order to reduce their ecological foot print with specific measurable actions. There are now groups also in the USA and Canada (www.carbonrationing.org.uk). Each woman each man, and each adolescent can start a group, with friends, neighbors, peers - everywhere.