

Web Blog SUNwalk 2008 – engl. III

1/21 – 1/23/2008

Needles – Kingman

1/21/2008

Needles – Oatman

Mary and George from the Needles Inn bless me and wish me a good journey. I felt very well with them. In the small motel lobby there is a big sofa with red heart pillows. On a small table there is a pit with coffee, with refills all day long. I can write in this small lobby during the whole day.

I am starting the next stretch of my journey, alone again. No single cloud can be discovered at the blue sky. I arrive at the bridge across the Colorado River. The river separates California from Arizona. A memorial plate describes some tracks of history: The bridge is part of the Route 66, the traditional road that is also called National “Old Trails Highway” or “Mother Road”. In 1776 Father Garces crossed the river here, on his journey to the Mojave Indian Lands. In 1826 Jedediah Smith and his Rocky Mountains men were also here opening the first pioneer trail, the first connection to South California.

Willard is pushing his bike and a heavy cart uphill towards the bridge. “I am not riding the bike for the environment. They took almost everything away from me, including my driver’s license. The 6-year veteran is pleased that he didn’t follow the bad rhetoric against the unions. From the union he receives a small pension of \$ 450 a month. “Therefore I don’t have to look for food in garbage places.” He has also walked recently, from Tennessee to Needles. “I had to move on.” He points towards the sky: “Jehova will end mankind. We are so imperfect. I don’t vote. The politicians are corrupt, all of them.” I would elect Barak Obama, I say, having the impression he is a good human being. “Really? Somebody else told me that. I’ll think about it.”

After about 9 miles I leave route 95. I take a small route towards East, towards the Black Mountains.

“East” is one of my mantras during my journey. The physician Hannes Lindenmann crossed the Atlantic twice, once in an excavated tree trunk, once in a small commercial boat. Four mantras kept him alive: 1. West; 2. I’ll make it; 3. Keep going; 4. Don’t accept help. With this mental support he overcame the most difficult, most dangerous challenges. My challenges cannot be compared with those Lindenmann faced on the high sea. But once in a while I repeat also my 4 mantras: 1. East; 2. I’ll make it; 3. Keep going; 4. Stay out of cars until you’ll arrive in Boston.

Headlines in newspaper boxes catch my attention: USA Today, 1/21/2008: “States take on global warming”. More than half of all US States have chosen reduction targets for heat-trapping gases. They also have started programs to reach their goals – against President Bush. Some States even go to Court to defend their regulations against the attempt of the Environmental Protection Agency to block their efforts. In the same newspaper: “Taking on the Solar challenge”. Stirling Energy Systems plan to build two big solar power plants in the Mojave desert and in the Imperial Valley near San Diego, 70’000 dishes within the next 7 years doubling the present solar energy production in the USA, energy for 1 million households in S California. Mohave Valley Daily News: “Bullhead City goes green”: The Mayor of Bullhead City, Jack Hakim, has taken office in June 2007. He distances himself from Al Gore and from environmentalists; but nevertheless he has joined the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement: “I got pretty into what Vice President Al Gore had been talking about, just on that aspect. I don’t believe in his political philosophy but I do feel that we need to do something... and that also falls into clean energy as well. I am not going to sit and protest. I am not going to write letters. I’m not a tree hugger. I just believe in clean quality air and plenty of water and conservation.” Through rebates and tax breaks solar energy is promoted by the community. Bullhead City is also building up an excellent recycling program.

An impressive summit is situated in front of the Black Mountains – it looks like the Swiss Matterhorn consisting of red sandstone. The closer I get, the more majestic, the more beautiful it becomes. I decide to spend the night here, next to this great, silent companion. I put my tent already at 3 o’clock in the afternoon. I postpone the hike to the little gold mining town of Oatman to the next morning. The full moon is rising. The silence is sometimes interrupted by the barking and high pitch hurling of a coyote, sometimes by the squeaky sounds of bewildered mules that live here in the high desert. I am asleep already at 7 PM. At half past five I get up again and start my walk through the morning moon’s silver.

1/22/2008

The road winds up, steeply and long. Bushes along the way are decorated with Christmas balls, ribbons, Christmas glitter. A street sign announces wild mules. But they don't appear. Some cottages, rotten and burnt down. A car passes me. It returns after a while. A nurse wants to give me a ride to Oatman. "It's so cold, you must be freezing." Her offer gives me energy for the last stretch.

Cold and heat – we in Switzerland, most of the time, see them as normal variations of the seasons and accept them. Here low and high temperatures are often experienced as threatening. Several people I met so far cannot understand that I walk in the winter time; although the temperature we have here is comparable to the temperature we have in Elm, in the mountains of the canton Glarus, on a rainy summer day...

"Welcome to Oatman, Arizona. You're just a few minutes away from a step back in time", a big sign invites visitors to the town. Oatman was trembling of excitement during gold rush times. Now it attracts some tourists. Gun shooting is staged – "High Noon" as a theater play. The "Burros", the wild donkeys and mules are seen as attractions as well. Horseback riding is offered: "Walk-ins welcome – views guaranteed".

When I arrive in the town center – essentially two rows of gift shops, Wild West bars, a hotel ruin (1902), the Olive Oatman Restaurant & Saloon, the only eating place in town – everybody seems still asleep. After a while I meet a young couple that is also craving for breakfast. Next to the restaurant door there is a red OPEN sign, but the door is locked. I remember the Chaplin movie "Gold Rush", the scene with the shoe sole meal, and I hope that the other visitors won't have chicken hallucinations when they see me again... Suddenly I see a short, old man coming out of the tiny little post office – with a metal detector he is examining the ground around the post office, evidently looking for lost coins – gold rush 2008. Another man with white cowboy hat – symbol for the "good guys", I'll learn the next day in the Mohave museum in Kingman - comes out of a trailer and walked towards the restaurant. And indeed, he gives me confidence that the owners will arrive soon. And really, some seconds later, a little white car arrives. A man leaves the car and comes directly towards me, full of enthusiasm, he shows his cellular phone: "Haley Marie is my first grand-child. She has been born last night, 7 pounds. Isn't she beautiful!?" After a while the picture appears on the small screen, and we share the joy looking at her. It takes another while until fantastic floppy pancakes with butter and jam appear in front of me, time to explore the room: Guns, the wood work rotten, the metal rusty, are hanging on the wall, not for sale. A black T-shirt with white writing - "What's A Nice Girl Like You Doing in A Dirty Mind Like Mine" - and "Stuffed Burro, \$ 8.0 pl. tx." for sale. Justine the waitress lets greet her mother in Amherst, Mass., when she hears about my walk. She refills my cup with coffee, again and again. She tells me that some day a group of Swiss Jaguar fans have

arrived with their shiny cars. She couldn't understand that they were so eager to buy the Route 66 stickers and glue them immediately onto their shiny limousines.

More and more men come for a drink or for breakfast, a young cowboy and characters from the town, also a retired construction business man: "Once I had an employee who walked in wooden shoes from the East Coast to San Francisco. First, I didn't believe him; but then he brought a book with all these pictures. His shoes were great. You just heard on the construction site where he was. By the way, I saw you yesterday afternoon sitting near the road and reading a newspaper."

Like a mule that hurries up going uphill in order to have enough momentum and to arrive as early as possible I walk briskly towards the Sitgreaves pass (3550 feet), four miles. I pass an old mine, the tunnels can still be seen, also the little rusty carts. It is an awesome landscape. Bizarre mountains – they surround a smaller mountain in the middle like an elephant herd a threatened elephant baby. Often the view extends far towards both sides of the mountain ridges, towards the plains. The colors - purple, brown-reddish, tan in all nuances, lion fur like. The rough rocks point steeply towards the sky, the erosion slopes like an Asian rice farmer hut, sometimes covered by a veil of fresh green grass.

There is one mountain that attracts me most. It's the biggest one on the East side of the mountain ridge, counterpart to the red Matterhorn. It's very mysterious, remote, beyond this world. Its summit is high up in the clean blue air. White clouds are dancing around it. It reminds me of a painting of the Belgian painter Rene Magritte. Magritte once writes: "My painting, visible images which conceals nothing; they evoke mystery and, indeed, when one sees one of my pictures, one asks oneself this simple question 'What does that mean?'. It does not mean anything because mystery means nothing either, it is unknowable." I am in deep awe feeling the mystery of this mountain, of the blue sky, the white clouds, and the shadows on the mountain slopes that make this landscape even more alive and beautiful.

One encounter after the other, first with Ed and Falba, Jerry and Hermelia from Mississippi; then with Karin and Jim from Maine; Don and Kathy Parker from Neehah, Wisconsin, they stop their fantastic motorbike; with the Apache Indian Lebroy and his partner Lee. He comes from S New Mexico. He got a job with Boeing, construction of military airplanes. The corporation recruited Native Americans in order to fill up their minority quota. He needed a job. Therefore he moved to California.

Going down is sheer pleasure, rolling down with James. Just before I reach the big plain there is a restaurant and gasoline station, old style; but they are not working, it's only a museum. No food, no gasoline. But the gasoline station with the red Mobilgas Pegasus still shows the price for a gallon: 14 1/2 cents...

I have a snack, sitting on the red chairs warmed up by the sun. Suddenly a visitor is here: a big bird, brown-white speckles; and when the sun lights up his feathers they appear olive-green. He has a feather crown on its head that he moves, together with its long tail. But the most beautiful parts of the animal are his eyes: The pattern of the feathers let the eyes appear as they belonged to an oriental fairytale beauty. The bird comes closer, watches me, walks, hops around, jumps onto a window sill. It keeps me company for at least 20 minutes. I am enjoying the silent dialogue with this creature. Lebroy and Lee tell me what it is: A roadrunner – we don't know this bird in Europe; although there are some other roadrunners around...

The owner of the antique shop comes after a while and feeds the bird pieces of dried meat. He likes that. He didn't take the nuts and dried fruit I offered him.

Originally, I had the intention to arrive in Kingman tonight. But it's too far away. Therefore I put my tent on a huge private property after having found a hole in the barbed wire fence. I am concerned because it's private property. I look for a place where the tent cannot be seen, behind some big Yucca plants. Before I go to sleep I check the way out of the property so that I can leave easily in the dark the next morning. But the tent is so well hidden, that I almost don't find it anymore. I am looking for it for quite a while, between thorny bushes, cactuses, Yucca trees. I cross washes, I see all kind of animal holes and caves; and I am very relieved when I discover again the yellow tent. I open the tent curtain – the sun is just setting, exactly behind the mysterious Magritte summit. The full moon has its turn again. It fills my tent with a soothing light during the whole night.

1/23/2008

I am asleep already at six o'clock; so I am fully wake at 3 30 AM. The ten miles to Kingman almost never come to an end – time to experience the slow awakening of the day. At first, dark night; the Venus is shining at the Eastern sky. Then there is a hunch of lighting up at South-East. The black velvet cover of the fields and mountains shows more and more holes, more and more details can be seen. After a while the light above the horizon cannot be denied anymore. Welcome, new day.

Shortly before sunrise I loose Route 66. There is a sign: End of the paved road. And suddenly there is no road anymore – a wash with barbed wire that crosses underneath freeway 40. I crawl under the fence, pull James with me, and after a thousand feet through the deep sand I find my way back to Route 66.

Now, the sun is here. The abundance of light caresses the rocks with the shining clarity. There are huge heads and faces, columns, big puppets, layers of sandstone sand bags. The rocks – a petrified archetype of the Wild West – remind me of old pictures of Native American land, of Wild West movies such as “Stagecoach”, but also of the Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck magazines we read as children – always and only in the train so we didn’t disturb the other passengers 😊. And the honking of the next Union Pacific locomotive fits very well all these memories. It pulls a mile long train across the mountain ridge into the next plain, the plain of Kingman.

I have eaten the last food the night before, a package of salted almonds and some dried blueberries. I crave for a nice breakfast. What a joy to find a small restaurant filled with happy, enjoying people, what a joy to eat a veggie omelet, pancakes, to drink milk. During walking food has a high priority. The enjoyment is amplified by periods of craving. Also the language of the restaurant personnel is adapting to this importance – all guests are named “honey” by the friendly waitress.

The watches show a different time in Kingman. I have already crossed the time zone. Now I can understand why in Oatman Justine told me that the hot breakfast will be served only at 9 AM – and at 8 AM it was on the table...

Entering Kingman I see a memorial plate for Edward Fitzgerald Beale (1822 – 1893). This general crossed the USA with the only US camel caravan in order to explore the territory for a wagon route.

In the Mohave Museum I watch three short films, one about mining, one about ranching, and one about Route 66. I learn that this “Mother Road” or “Beale’s Wagon Road” lead from Chicago to L. A. The idea to build it originated in 1916. It was constructed between 1926 and 1937. During the depression more than 50’000 families used the road with all their belongings to find a new place to live in California; but many of them didn’t make it there. After WW II, Route 66 was flourishing. People traveled on it with their new shiny US cars. When the freeways were built, e.g. the freeway 40 in 1953, Route 66 lost its central position.

When the museum people hear from my walk, they give me the entrance fee back. Everywhere I find helpful people along the route.

1/24/2008

Kingman

Today it's raining, what a gift for the dry soil. I am also pleased – time to read and write in the Public Library of Kingman.

A friend from Tucson, South Arizona, Barbara Warren, sends me information about regional buds of hope. The Civano Elementary School in Vail School District East of Tucson has been chosen as the "greenest school" of the nation, in connection with the Ellen DeGeneres Show: <http://www.azstarnet.com/allheadlines/221271>).

Other Solar Schools: <http://www.greenwatts.com/pages/Community.html#Civano>.

Also an article about how much Phoenix is doing to promote solar energy:
<http://www.azcentral.com/community/ahwatukee/articles/0114phxsolar0114.html>

In the LA Times of today there is an article about the big Automobile Show in Detroit. Especially energy efficient cars, hybrids and plug-in hybrids find the biggest interest of the visitors.

Allen sends me web site addresses of consumer guides. Enterprises are classified, and the consumer can choose ecologically and socially excellent services and products.
www.betterworldshopper.com/rankings.html"<http://www.betterworldshopper.com/rankings.html>

<http://www.roughguides.com/website/shop/products/Shopping-with-a-Conscience.aspx>"<http://www.roughguides.com/website/shop/products/Shopping-with-a-Conscience.aspx>

I also read an article about the resistance against the planned coal power plant Ely Energy Center in Utah. Another article mentions the big problems nuclear power plants face because of the drought. 24 of 104 US nukes are situated in drought areas and need water for cooling. In Alabama one nuclear power plant has been shut down for a while in summer 2007 because of lack of water.

Again and again synchronicities: At breakfast in the hotel I just met Bill and Sharon Stine from Santa Fe, NM. Bill is an expert for solar energy, former professor. He worked also a lot with solar cars and solar boats. They walked the pilgrim's path of St. James of Compostela some years ago. If I choose the South route because of too much snow in the Rockies I may visit them in Santa Fe.

I am glad that Route 66 still exists. I will stay on it during the next days, Hackberry, Valentine, Truxton, Peach Springs, Seligman, Ash Fork to Williams. There I will choose the route towards the Grand Canyon. Then again, East, East, East.