

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

Sunday, April 3, 1966 WND WASHINGTON

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Palm Sunday, April 3rd, will stand as one of the most unforgettable days I have lived through since Lyndon came into this job. Perhaps always.

It began very early -- up before 7:00, dressed in blue jeans, checkered shirt, heavy striped sweater and tennis shoes, and down to the basin. And right in the middle of the road, a table spread with a red checkered table cloth and the Odessa chuck wagon gang in their deep yellow and brown shirts, pouring scalding, "six-shooter coffee" from big black pots and loading your plate with hot flap-jacks and home-cured ham and thick bacon ^{some} and they had ~~solid~~ dough biscuits -- although they had trouble making them rise in this high altitude.

For some strange reason, as tired as I had been the night before, I had a sleepless night. One of those weird nights when you don't know whether you slept at all. I don't know whether it's due to excitement or high altitude, but it did not spoil my appetite or my ^lrelish for the day.

When we had all eaten our fill ^l and I am sure everybody threw dieting to the winds on this trip ^l a very young preacher, ~~xxx~~ Reverend Davis, Chaplain of the Park, stood at a rude pulpit and conducted a simple, effective, brief Palm Sunday service. Behind him loomed the most spectacular background, ^{? ch. tape} Great, rugged, upthrust of rock, rising to the sky, battered here and there with a pinon tree. And all bathed in the incredibly clear, fresh light of morning. Deep down in the basin they had watched the morning come, touching first the peaks of the highest mountains and then moving on and down. Light is a great part of the drama in this country.

Then, next, I planted a pinon tree. Perfect shape, wonderful little specimen about seven feet high. There is a new Park concessions building going up with

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a great picture window looking toward a huge divide in the mountains. A natural, magnificent vista. This pinon will frame one side of the picture. Stu and I divided honors.

By 8:30^{2.41}₁ we were in our cars headed for the place where we were to get into the rafts for the trip down the Rio Grande. It was a long ~~and~~ ride -- everything here is long. It is a wild, forbidding, hostile-to-men kind of country. And magnificent. And you feel you want to match it. I do not think that I will forget it soon. We were descending constantly ^{from} ~~in~~ an altitude of six or so thousand feet up in the Chisos Mountains and from the country of pinon pines, oaks and the juniper. Some kinds I had never seen before, the alligator juniper ^{with} ~~its~~ very scaly trunk, and the drooping juniper -- looks like its long since had the last drop of water in the world.

I regretted very much that we were not going to see the relic ^{Forest} ~~forest~~.

The Douglas ^{fir} ~~fir~~, the ponderosa pine and even some maples and some quaking aspens just left over here, hundreds of miles from ^{more of their kind} ~~Machindred~~. They

^{Speak} ~~are~~ of a long ago age and a different climate condition. The ^{Forest} ~~Forest~~ Ranger said it was very dry and when they saw a fire break out anywhere, they were mighty scared and worked hard, because when those ponderosa pines ~~for~~ ^{re-seeding} ~~instance~~ go, there will be no more. (They are not ~~receding~~ ^{re-seeding} themselves ~~in~~ ^{at} ~~growing~~ to the huge size that these ~~retained~~.)

After a while we went down in the lowlands ² ~~which~~ are principally ~~mis~~quise and cottonwood. You can always tell where ~~a~~ man has been -- there will be a few cotton wood trees. That means water. There is nothing so green as a cottonwood in the early spring. And the wind sings in its little rustling

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leaves. The desert was full of all kinds of cactus, many unfamiliar to me.

All sorts of Spanish dagger that I'm used to -- agave, litchigia, so tall.

A plant I didn't know, ^{Croton} ~~pleostat~~ bush, an evergreen shrub with waxy leaves

and small yellow blossoms that rangers hate because it takes over everything --

nothing grows under it. And most exotic the ^{Opuntia} ~~cactia~~, "coach whip", which looks

like about a dozen long coach whips stuck into the ground, spraying out in a

weeping fashion ^{with} of small bright red blossoms ^{Run} ~~run~~ down their spiny stalks and

the tiniest little green leaves. These come out after a rain. Any time it rains

they will come again and again, the Ranger told me.

Here and there the luxuriant bell-like blossoms of the big ^{Yuccas} ~~yuccas~~.

Mostly, it was the wildest country ^I ~~I've~~ ever saw. There were acres -- miles -- of something called "desert pavement." They just look about like broken up cement stacked in slabs, pinkish brown, arid beyond belief, as far as you can see. No wonder they send astronauts out here to train for a possible landing on the moon. ~~XXX~~ And I can believe that story about a man and his wife who got stranded in their car -- they ran out of gas or something -- and he got out to walk for help and was found days later dead.

And a delightful sight I saw was a road-runner up in an ^{Opuntia} ~~ocotilla~~ -- all of six feet off the ground. Those weird, awkward birds can hardly fly. And I yearned for a camera. But I hadn't brought it purposely. This area is a geologists show case, twice covered by an inland sea. ~~Some~~ Some of the fossil remains of sea life, dinosaurs, and even a giant crocodile. A head of one has been uncovered. He must have been fifty feet long. ^{Signs} ~~Seeing~~ of mountain-building by volcanic activities through the untold centuries. If you just knew

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what you were looking at it would be infinitely more fascinating than it was. Mostly what I could think of was that homesteader, traveling by wagon and burro across this desert with a small child, pregnant wife and one Mexican guide for the week or so that it took him to get to the hot springs that he ^{had} staked out as his own.

A little after 10:30 we reached the spot on the Rio Grande ^{where} and our rafts were staked out and the most hilarious day really began.

Isabelle Shelton said, "There probably hasn't been such a motley flotillas since the British marshalled every available craft for the evacuation at Dunkirk." Actually, there were some 24 rafts -- about five or six persons aboard each -- a trip that took us over five hours down the Rio Grande 11 miles, though it seemed like at least fifty. It's really ^{one of} the last frontiers.

In all of last year a little less than 500 people had made the raft trip -- Ambokias, Santa [?] Elena and Mas[?]cow Canyon -- Mas[?]cow was ours. Among the river riders, of course, was Bill Douglas.

And here we were -- 139 all in one trip. The ^{Rio Grande} big ~~daddy~~ ^{SAW} never seen anything like it!

Later, ~~when~~ ^{And} Stu said; "You have had a wilderness experience, I think you will look back five, ten or twenty years from now and think that this was something quite spectacular." Isabelle Shelton answered; "It ^{MAY} take the big ~~band area~~ ^{Big Bend area} without question one of the ~~most~~ ^{most} nation's most awesomely spectacular ^{exhibits} ~~inhibits~~ of largely undiscovered natural wonderlands ^{longer} longer than that to recover from the invading ~~immortal~~."

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I went in a yellow raft, Stu and me and Jerry Kivitt and two Rangers, — which gave us four wonderful paddlers. Stu is a natural outdoors man. But I found that for me they had an inflated rubber seat in the front, presumably the most comfortable spot on the boat. But it also made me look about three feet high for photographs. They set me aside as having special treatment, something that I haven't quite learned to master, as avoiding the VIP treatment, ^{is} ~~which~~ ^{is} frequently more trouble than it's worth.

There were two elements at war in this trip -- two jarring components -- the country and the people. I liked them both, but together they were pandemonium. The country was soon great soaring cliffs that rose up on each side, 1800, 1900 feet high, like giant pipe organs, cathedral ^{spires} ~~spirals~~, embattlements of some long ago civilization, ^{on the escarpments} of a vast ~~discontinuities~~ of another world ^{where} ~~as~~ the dinosaurs might still be living. Sometimes ^{even} you would see a cave. Occasionally in just a cup full of soil there would be a cactus. Sometime even a blooming strawberry cactus, [?] auyuka, [?] ornokatia, or even a stunted piñon. And along the banks, river cane, that the Mexicans used to thatch their huts with. The most ^slucious coastal Bermuda. I wish our pastures were like it. But mostly they were just the awesome spires of the canyon walls pierced by centuries of wind, eroded by centuries of water, with all sorts of tales to tell to a geologist. And above, the bluest sky. I think over and over what the Lord didn't give to us, ⁱⁿ lush fertility in this country, he gave in the drama of the sky and the light, the changing light. Some times in the heavy shadows of the canyon walls it was almost purple and quite chilly. And then

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in the sun it was broiling hot. There was a moment of silence. You would hear the sweet call of the canyon ^{wren} ~~wind~~. Once we saw a peregrine ~~falcon~~ falcon. Many times the high-rise apartments of cliff swallows. And always you were conscious that right on the other side, often within spitting distance, was the ~~boundary~~ boundary of Mexico. Once we ~~came~~ came to a spot where the ^Camanche Trail used to cross the river where the Indians on cattle and horse raids used to come down from the North, stealing all the cattle and horses they could get and cross into Mexico.

The River is shallow nearly everywhere, sometimes only about 15 inches.

(And then when we go over the pebbles Liz had called it the ^{Stauffer Couch} ~~stover~~ cats treatment.) Sometimes there were rapids. They were the delight of the photographers. The raft rolled and twisted, oarsmen fought to guide it. Some of them overturned. Ours, with expert paddlers, never did. Sometimes it deepened to 20 feet, in calm pools shaded by the canyon walls. And I remember the homesteaders' stories of the 30 and 40 pound catfish they used to catch. And Bill Douglas', a catfish even bigger.

But then there was the other component -- the hilarious component of those 139 people -- laughing and shrieking and joking, falling out of the rafts by accident in the rapids ^{and} /on purpose in the good swimming holes.

The star of the show was the lady with the red parasol. Yesterday on the walk she had worn ^N red pants, designed for a much slimmer woman, and carried every foot of the way a red parasol. To our incredulous delight she still gripped it the entire five hours of the trip down the Canyon and was the second most photographed person along, I'm sure. She had one runner-up.

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A newspaper woman in a black and white polka-dot bikini with a figure to suit it.

Frances ^{Lewis}~~Lewis~~ and Helen Thomas, who may never have handled a paddle before, paddled practically the whole way.

I was always conscious of ~~the~~ photographers with that equipment worth thousands of dollars, ^{Scrambling} over the slippery rocks, jumping out of the rafts trying to get ^{to} a vantage point as we would come down the rapids. It's amazing -- the only casualty of the trip was a man who had slipped in his bedroom back at the Hotel on the first night getting up to answer the telephone in a hurry and broke his ankle.

There were always ^{cries} ~~cries~~ of "man overboard". And I remember one moment in going down the rapids I saw a man cling to a rock and fighting a losing battle to maintain his grip against the swift rush of the water. I never knew what happened, but apparently he let go and got safely to calm water.

Only I ~~insisted~~ insisted that I, together with Lee, take a turn with the paddles. We did. I loved it. I always like to participate in whatever is being done. If I'm on the water, I want to swim or paddle. When I'm in the country, I'd rather walk than ride. At least until I've absorbed a good acquaintance with the land. And it was when I was paddling that they got the most hilarious picture of all -- Stu Udall stretched out in kingly comfort on his ^{back} ~~stomach~~ surveying the scenery when ^{you had} only to look back to laugh, seeing our flotilla of some 24 spread up and down the River. I took off my shoes and sat on the edge of the raft and ^{dragged} ~~drag~~ my feet in the cool water. The Rangers offered us a sip from their canteen. Though lukewarm, how welcome it was. And Lee had very wisely ^{rucked} ~~taken~~ some

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apples in his bag which was shared from time to time.

We stopped at Rattle snake bar, named by Liz, where we had a quite good boxed lunch -- fried chicken and deviled eggs, cookies. And some of us had the foresight to put the rest back in the sack for the rest of the trip.

What a many-faceted job is "advancing"! ^{it} Somebody had to think about getting those portable johnnies down the River ahead of us and set up in discrete spots. Everybody was happy and full of laughter, and E even Betty Beale, the most unlikely candidate for such a tour, loved it. (But Liz Carpenter was heard to remark at the end of the day that she only wanted to go to places that the Rockefeller's had their concessions from now on. *✓*)

Somehow Nancy Dickerson, whose camera incidentally was always in the right place, managed to look like she had just stepped right out of Vogue.

In the middle of the afternoon, we emerged from the canyons ^{into} a flatter country. The river cane was heavy on each side. And suddenly in a break in it we saw a little campsite, with four Mexicans standing quite silent and still -- one in a bright red shirt. The Rangers explained somewhere back in the bushes they had their ^{Boiler} ~~boyle~~ or whatever it takes -- that they were turning the ^{Confelaria} ~~candilia~~ plant into a very fine wax. It is of the very highest grade for commercial purposes. Somebody quipped, "tell 'em it's Coronado coming back."

And just before we landed, in ~~then~~ that incredible blue sky some clouds rolled up. And a light shower of rain fell mercifully on the land and the lady with the red umbrella was justified again. Buses were waiting for us. It had after all only taken ~~x~~ us about five hours. And then there was another hour's

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drive with everybody quite weary to the Rio Grande Village Camp Ground.

I went into the ladies' room and changed into cleaner and dryer cloths. Some of the people were ^wringing wet -- not us -- just sprayed and very dirty.

And then we went out into a big grove of cottonwoods that surrounds a little lake with a magnificent view of the Sierra Del ^{Carmen} ~~Calvin~~ mountains over in Mexico -- every ^{mauve} ~~shade~~ shade of lavender and blue and misty white and ~~mov~~.

And now ^{Came} our old friends, the Odessa Chuck Wagon gang with a barbeque pit and some marvelous smelling steaks, preceded by margaritas ^a or scotch and a good reclining spot on the grass! Nash Castro joined us and Dick White, Congressman from this District who has been with us every foot of the way. I met a lot of the local ladies ^{and} "local" covers a pretty wide range in this country ^{who} who had made the flower center pieces for our tables that were once more bedecked with the red-checked table cloths.

We were grateful for our hearty dinner.

A little bit of wind came up with sand in it -- one of the hazards of this country. There was guitar music -- songs of the country. Stu Udall handed out to the reporters and photographers an hilariously worded certificate announcing they are members of the original American wet-bottoms.

Full to the brim ^{with}, exercise and sights and laughter, we rode home and were gratefully in bed by 9:30.

Isabelle Shelton's last line about the day: "Only the fit survive." ^{ff}