

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Friday, June 17, 1966

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Friday, June 17th, the first day of my strange vacation.

I spent the morning recording and walking the run-way with the oldest Sultemeier boy telling him where to shread and what to save -- the thickest stands <sup>Indian</sup> blanket, the yucca, and delightfully enough a little of the tall red standing cypress that we had brought from the Weinheimer's place.

And then about 5:00 in the afternoon, I decided I would have my first try at walking the Pedernales River.

Clarence had gotten the map of the area between here and Johnson City. He told me he thought it was about 4-1/2 miles <sup>from</sup> to a bridge over the Pedernales as one heads towards the Sharnhorst place down to the spot in the River pasture of the Sharnhorst where the road goes down to the River. Somebody else estimated that it was about 2-3/4 miles. Anyhow, it sounded feasible.

So I drove to the bridge and about 5:30 the three of us started walking. Clarence and Jerry <sup>Rivett</sup> ~~Tibbitt~~ and I. It was still hot but the best time of the day was approaching -- late evening <sup>and</sup> in the long twilight.

Clarence had on a ~~stopwatch~~ <sup>pedometer</sup> which he read from time to time.

Once along the river bank I saw a group of bluebells -- one in perfect bloom! It reminded me of Mrs. Johnson. And then in a shallow little pool, absolutely motionless, we came upon a ribbonsnake, about three feet long, a band of yellow running down each side and along his back a band of orange-red. Perfect markings -- beautiful and harmless. We let him be, although Clarence had his gun at the ready in case we found a rattlesnake.

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In another pool there was a turtle -- his carapace as mossy as some of the stagnant water that had been dried by the sun.

Mostly we clung to the river's edge, walking sometimes through sand-bars -- it was heavy going -- sometimes on limestone with faults running across the River clearly defined, making rapids whose murmur filled the air. Suddenly I said to Clarence, "Look to your left but don't do anything."

There ambling in a dignified and unhurried manner over the rocks and brush was a skunk -- his white tail waving -- not more than 15 feet from me.

Clarence was closer. But the wind was in our favor. The skunk did not notice us. We stood motionless. He, or she, climbed up into a tangle of brush that well might have been a nest. We could still see the tail waving. So we went quietly on our way.

Every now and then we passed a deep pool -- cool and inviting. A good place to fish. And once we could see fair size fish -- dozens of them -- some 8 or 10 inches long.

Suddenly, surprisingly, we came across a dam built by human hands -- at least half of a dam still firm and solid on the South side -- completely broken in the middle and gone -- no joining at all on the North side.

Clarence's pedometer read 2-3/4 miles from our starting point. He had never heard of such a dam.

A little ways down we found huge boulders with projecting pieces of steel from them. We could see on the down-river side of the dam some of the steel emerging!

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And then a little further down we came to a road -- certainly not a very good road -- but one could cross the River on it. That was three miles from the bridge.

Sometimes, fat ~~Black~~ Angus graze in the pasture across from us.

Once we saw two deer, <sup>who</sup> ~~the~~ had just been down to get a drink at the River and were melting into the brush. And a little later I heard a snort right behind me. Clarence didn't even turn his head. He said that's a deer -- it's the alarm sound they give when they see somebody so any other deer will know.

Clarence's pedometer read 4, 5, and more miles. We stopped and I drank a bottle of beer. The sky was going through its beautiful drama of changing light -- big, pink, powder puffs of clouds darkening at the edges as the light waned.

Gradually, we began to make jokes about just around that bend in the River we would come to the rapids and then pretty soon we will be at the Sharnhorst. We kept in touch by talking machines. Yes, Ben <sup>Blau</sup>saman and Dale Keener had gotten down to the Sharnhorst landing. No, they couldn't hear us. We had to go through Volcano.

We came to a big sandy hillock with dozens of small white eggs all broken. Clarence said, "Turtle eggs." He turned them over with his foot to decide whether they had hatched and the little turtles had gone or whether some raccoon or ringtail had found them and eaten them.

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All the way in wet places we came across tracks, tracks, tracks. Sometimes a heron whose feet must have been 5 inches long. Coon tracks and some that they thought might be a ringtail and many deer. A killdeer, a sandpiper -- escorted us for miles and miles. It always seemed the same one. At first I thought we were disturbing his nest and then when he stayed so long with us I decided he was just interested in people -- a gregarious fellow. There were flights of glossy, black-winged birds with bright red spots. Clarence didn't know ~~them~~ their names.

By now we~~xx~~ were beginning to make jokes that didn't quite ring <sup>true</sup> ~~through~~ -- about we would get <sup>there</sup> just as dark fell. And dark was getting closer and closer.

Just before it really fell in a sandy stretch we came across some wide winding track that curved very definitely and clearly for 20 feet or more down the river. Clarence said, "That's a snake track". "He's a big fellow."

Here we were stepping over boulders and it was hard to find our way. Clarence had called Dale Keener at the car at the landing and asked him to send ~~Ben~~ Ben Blausaman with a flashlight walking in our direction because very soon there would be no light at all.

Clarence was always in the lead. We were pretty silent now -- just trying to keep together and keep our footing on the boulders and brush and watching for Ben's light in front of us.

A little while before Jerry had called and asked for <sup>the</sup> ~~Henry~~ <sup>Huey</sup> to come to the Ranch and then await orders.

The last time we looked at the pedometer it had said something over 7 miles -- a joke ~~one~~ that meant 10 feet east and then 20 feet north climbing

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around a boulder and then 30 feet south and then on east again.

It must have been about 8:15 when real dark fell. Suddenly right in front of us to our right we saw a flashlight and heard Ben <sup>Bluss</sup>Blussaman's welcome voice.

The first thing we asked him, "How <sup>far</sup> ~~long~~ have you been coming?" He said he thought about a mile and a half. Clarence said, "I'm going to shoot my gun and in a minute you fire yours." They did. On the talking machine he asked Dale Keener if he had heard the shots. The answer came back "negative." He asked Dale Keener to get the spotlight out of his car and shine it up into the sky and then move it around in an arch. We couldn't see anything. We kept on walking. By now it was pitch dark but Ben had his flashlight and I was right behind him. But the walking was ever so much difficult. Solid terrain of boulders. Once out of them, into the brush. And there was a slough on our left and we couldn't get across it.

We began to joke with Ben ~~he~~ about how much territory he had covered -- how fast he had come. He said, "Yes, ~~and~~ you all said get that light and come. I just took out in a trot."

Finally an interminable distance down the river it seemed we saw a light moving steadily. It must be Dale Keener. And then Ben said, "Oh, it must not be more than another mile. But I had to come down some cliffs and we'll have a little harder time going back up them in the dark."

Meanwhile, Jerry had called <sup>the Huey</sup> ~~Huey~~ at the Ranch. It had arrived and he asked it to proceed along the Pedernales River about 500 feet up until it saw our

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light. Presently we emerged <sup>into</sup> from what seemed to be a sort of a flat, heavily grassed area close to the River. They walked around it. It seemed safe for the helicopter to land, in case it could find us. Dale's light at the car was still an interminable distance away. Jerry said, "We can bring 'em in herewith this light. He can land right here with no trouble. There's no wires, no trees. I think it makes more sense for us to let him pick us up."

Clarence agreed, and I rather shamefacedly said nothing which amounted to agreement.

Oddly enough across the River and rather behind us we could see a glow of light which must be Johnson City. There must be some tremendous bend in the river. We couldn't have passed Johnson City. However when Clarence looked at his pedometer it registered 9-3/4 miles.

Very quickly the bright fire-fly above us that was the <sup>Heey</sup> ~~Harvey~~ approached closer and closer, swung low, passed over us. Jerry said, "I'm going to put this light down in the center of the leveled space. You land right on it!" And we all retreated to the edge of the circle. Jerry said, "Turn the other way when he lands. There will be some grass blowing."

And sure enough he came in, hovered low, settled down. <sup>And</sup> In a matter of minutes we were in the cozy interior of the helicopter -- the pilot with a big smile, and we began rising up into the air.

I looked over to our left and there in <sup>the</sup> supposedly level space was a big grassy ditch some 15 feet deep -- no trouble when walking, but I wondered if it would have troubled the helicopter. We were up in the air following the river, and it is remarkable how many lights one can see from up high.

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It is as though the world is very well peopled, while down on the ground by the river we thought we were really in the wilderness. It looked like there was a whole string of farm houses up and down the riverside somewhere.

<sup>had</sup>  
We heard a turkey gobble and a dog bark. But we never saw any lights.

~~And~~ Then in a few minutes we were at home. We walked in. It was 9:15, and I was famished! Jerry and Clarence were both grinning broadly, although I still felt a little shamefaced about the <sup>Huey</sup>~~Howeys~~

James brought me an old-fashioned and I curled up in bed to look at the "Man from UNCLE". And Mary fixed me a tray of fried catfish and slaw.

And then a hot bath and to bed.

My only really real worry is if I do any more river walking, will I have <sup>companion?</sup>  
any ~~campers~~.