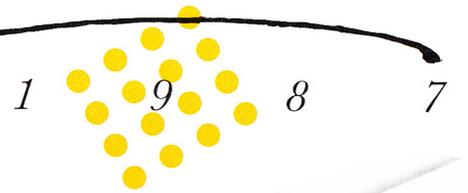


Life



Plane Geography

“Interactive” is the word Choate Rosemary Hall fine arts teacher John Faulkner uses to describe his own particular brand of photography.

“I rarely ‘shoot and run,’” he explains. “Almost all the photographs I take are of individuals, people with whom I’ve managed to establish some sort of relationship.”

There’s so much to learn from people “if you ask” and “have your eyes open,” he says. This philosophy informs his classroom approach as well as his much-praised photographs. Photo assignments for his classes include weekly field trips to locations off campus which will open his students’ eyes and introduce them to people they may not have met otherwise. John’s young photographers have visited a family-run dairy farm; a hospital; factory; welding shop; and a junk yard (where they were asked to photograph “order in chaos.”)

John Faulkner’s own “stretching” took him recently to the “edges of America”—the coastlines and borderlands of the United States—in his own small plane. The accompanying article provides an overview of John’s unique journey and its result: a photographic essay that records the cultural diversity of the country



In Seattle, John met up with a man in the fishing industry who took him “long-lining” for black cod, and in Yakima, Washington, he talked to an 86-year-old pilot who had known Orville Wright.

Over the Dakotas John had his only flying scare when ice formed on his wings and his plane temporarily handled like “a barn door.”

Frenchville, Maine



On August 20, 1986, at 1:37 p.m. E.S.T. John Faulkner touched down safely at the Meriden airport. Since his departure from there two months before he had traveled 10,036 miles in 75.6 hours of flying time and averaged 30 miles per gallon to secure two national records. He also took 92 rolls of black and white film and 16 rolls of color slides (about 4,000 images) to develop and print himself. He hopes to publish the resulting photo-essay, “The Edges of America,” in 1988.

An example to his students, John Faulkner has succeeded in aligning himself with the “mentors” who’ve influenced him the most. Surprisingly, they are not famous photographers such as Alfred Steiglitz or Ansel Adams. John’s heroes are pioneers and explorers, the ones who first pushed their way to the borders of America.

“Plane Geography” is excerpted from an article by Lisa Firke, a staff writer in the office of publications and public information at Choate Rosemary Hall in Wallingford, Connecticut.

Imagine flying a small plane over 10,000 miles to photograph the people living along the “edges of America.”

Photographer John Faulkner imagined just such a journey, and at 10:14 a.m. E.S.T. on June 15, 1986, the Choate Rosemary Hall teacher took off from Meriden, Connecticut’s Markham Airport in a light, experimental plane. John had put nearly 1,000 hours of work into his aircraft, a VariEze, including painting it and cutting a 2¼ inch hole in the underside to accommodate his camera for aerial shots. He had also spent months writing proposals, which resulted in a grant from the Choate Rosemary Hall Foundation and a leave of absence from the Wallingford, Connecticut school for the 1986 fall term.

The first stop on his clockwise circumnavigation of the continental U.S. was Atlantic City, New Jersey. His impressions of that “worldly place” contrast strikingly with the more “naive and innocent” rural areas he saw later in his trip. In Atlantic City’s Caesar’s Palace, John photographed a “highroller” who gambled away \$10,000, doubled the stakes and won it back.

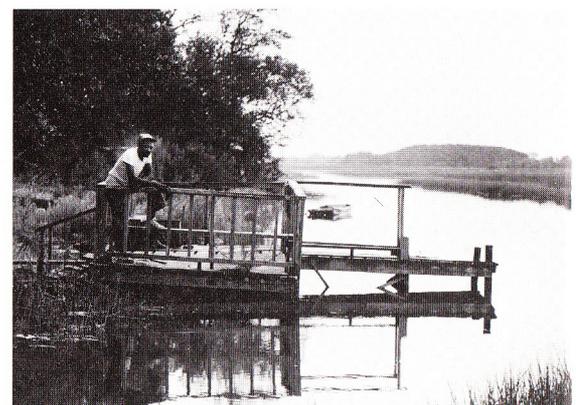
After exploring the coastal regions of the Southeast, John spent the Fourth of July sampling Cajun food and music in New Orleans. From Louisiana it was on to a 65,000-acre ranch near Valentine, Texas, where he rode the range with cowhands and observed an authentic round-up and branding. Decked out in chaps, he rode no-handed so he could manage the camera, he recalls.

The biggest challenge of the trip came in trying to photograph the Papagos Indians on their reservation near Sells, Arizona. The officials there kindly gave him permission to take pictures of the land, but he had to interview 50 people before three consented to be photographed. In addition to holding the traditional Native American belief that a photo “steals the soul,” the Papagos in the past, says John, had been photographed in “ways that didn’t make them feel proud.”

In contrast, John tries to capture the “integrity” of his subjects. He also believes that when he “takes” a picture he should give something in return. Sometimes this has meant listening to a life story, or sparing a little change,



Mt. Shasta, California



Charleston, South Carolina

Photos by John Faulkner