

APRIL 10, 1986

The car rental people are going to come off big winner on this trip. It's taken me eight hours to drive the 80 or 90 miles up the coast from Sea Island to Savannah. I'm unsure but I think school buses make the distance in less time.

The slow track hasn't been entirely my fault. A guy running an oyster and shrimp restaurant all but threw up a road block at lunch. By the time I'd challenged the house champions at freestyle shell work, I had to drive to an isolated part of the beach at St. Mary's and nap until my digestive system was able to spare enough oxygen to awaken my brain.

My hotel here at Savannah was named after General James Oglethorpe, the Englishman that colonized Georgia for his King. At every stop I've been making short visits to the book stores to read about the history of the state. General Oglethorpe got off to a good start. The first rules he laid down for his colonists were that they were forbidden to drink hard liquor, prohibited from trading with the Indians, and under no circumstances were lawyers permitted in the colony.

The reason, I think, that the General didn't want any lawyers around was because before he'd left England, his service in Parliament had been devoted to abolishing debtor's prisons. I suspect that along with not wanting any lawyers over here to find loop holes in his orders, he didn't want any of his people going broke paying the bills the loophole searchers charge.

Indian relations were handled a lot differently that they were in Texas. The Spanish were forcing their way up from Florida and the English were trying to hold them back. Both countries were trying to make alliances with the Creeks and other tribes for military reasons.

One of the books I read gave the English an undisputed edge over the Spanish in diplomacy with the aborigines. The book said, "The Spanish gave the Indians heavy iron hoes to replace the conch shell hoes they were using for their primitive farms. The English, in turn, gave the Indians tobacco, flints to fire their pipes, rations of dark rum, and hand held mirrors."

Without reading any further, it wasn't hard to figure out that His Majesty the King of England wasn't any slouch when it came to training diplomats. No records are immediately available, but I'm going to guess that the number of friendships made by giving heavy iron hoes is going to run about as high as the enthusiasm that man has for using those hoes.

General Oglethorpe was to spend 10 years and over 60,000 pounds of his personal wealth founding and settling the colony. But once he went back to England, he married a rich widow and never returned to Georgia. That's not so surprising when you realize that colonizers burn out just like real estate developers. It gets plenty old smoking stale peace pipes with un-bathed savages, and mighty tiresome building forts while the worst enemies turn out to be malaria mosquitoes. Of course the books don't say what that window lady looked like, but after a decade over here trying to chouse the Spanish back into Florida with one hand using the other one to try to comfort a bunch of wild Indians, I don't imagine she had to be very good looking to catch the general's attention.

I'm going to cut back on the oysters starting tomorrow. While shaving tonight I noticed that the whites of my eyes were turning the same color of grey of the outside shell. I don't know why I bothered renting a car. At the rate I'm traveling a saddle horse would have been just as good.