

Southwest Arkansas is like a foreign country to those unfamiliar with its vagaries. There are miles and miles of mountainous terrain there, often heavily forested. Once in the woods it is unlikely that you will see another human, and if you do you should view the meeting with trepidation.

I was completely unfamiliar with the terrain, as was Dr. K, but one of the State's geologists volunteered to meet us in DeQueen and then take us on a field trip to familiarize us with it. I was apprehensive of the trip because Dr. K didn't tolerate fools and I knew that I would have a hard time being on my best behavior for two days.

BC, the state geologist, had secured a cabin for us in DeQueen. The little wood-framed cabin had three bedrooms, a kitchen and a black and white television in the tiny living room. It also had indoor plumbing, for which I was grateful. We ate dinner at a barbecue joint and everything was going great, at least until Dr. K and BC stopped at a liquor store and purchased a large bottle of whiskey, and a bag of ice. When we returned to the cabin, they turned on the black and white and began mixing drinks.

"Have a drink, Wilder," BC said.

The whiskey looked inviting but I was afraid of embarrassing myself and being booted unceremoniously out of the geology department.

"I probably better pass," I said.

Dr. K had other ideas. "No self respecting geologist ever goes on a field trip without having a little whiskey. It's a tradition."

When I said, "We don't have any Cokes," they both cracked up.

"You can't spoil good sipping whiskey with Coke," BC said. "You have to drink it neat." I wasn't a very sophisticated person. Seeing the confused expression on my face, BC added, "With nothing added."

I almost gagged from the first sip of the strong whiskey but it got better the more I drank. I soon became very drunk. Still, everything would have gone okay if it had been for the show on TV. It was a local talent show, an early-day American Idol, and one of the contestants was a local with a distinct hillbilly twang, and his singing mule. I kid you not! Prompted, the mule began braying, keeping perfect time with the man as he sang Old Kalijah. It didn't end there. Soon the two were singing and dancing, yes dancing, across the stage. It was more than I could take!

Losing it, I rolled on the floor, overcome with uncontrollable laughter. Dr. K and BC were also laughing, caught up in the hilarity of the moment. The talent show continued and we kept drinking until the large bottle was empty. The next thing I remember was waking with a huge splitting head and sour stomach, wondering what I might have done to end my college career.

Dr. K and BC seemed none the worse for wear, although neither spoke a word until they'd had a couple of cups of coffee at the local diner.

I knew that I was okay when Dr. K said "Wilder, it's a good thing you're in geology. That damn mule last night can sing better than you."