



The least a rescued turtle can do is sit still for a portrait.

every time I saw one and helped it across the road. In exchange for this service they posed while I took their picture.

Along this same stretch of road, I found a helpless-looking black lady and a carload of kids staring forlornly at a flat tire. Seeing a chance to be a hero, I decided to take command of the situation and change the tire. After about five minutes of my failure to loosen the lug nuts, the lady asked "You sure you're turnin' them the right way?"

"Yes ma'am!" I replied. "They always turn counter-clockwise!" After another few futile minutes I decided to try turning them the other way out of desperation. Embarrassing Lesson Number One: The Left-Hand Thread

Visiting Ponca City is a must for anyone passing across the plains of northern Oklahoma. There are two museums there which feature many fascinating artifacts of the pioneers and the Indians. Outside one of the museums is a dramatic statue honoring the pioneer women, who seldom receive recognition for their many sacrifices.

The other museum is housed in an old mansion and was staffed (when I visited, at least) by a very distinguished-looking lady. Since I was dressed rather informally (jeans, leather jacket, work shirt, 10 o'clock shadow, etc.), I expected some disapproving looks. She was very polite however, and eager to explain the exhibits. (Throughout my trip, this type of treatment was the rule rather than



In Ponca City, Oklahoma this dramatic statue pays tribute to the pioneer women of the western frontier.

the exception.) After spending a few hours there, I concluded that one does not go to a museum simply to look at artifacts — but rather to get a glimpse, some little *feeling* of what the life represented was like.

Later that day I came upon a small sign indicating a Pawnee Indian village eight miles off the highway. This village was occupied during the 1820's and 1830's. It was made up of between 30 to 40 earth lodges which had housed about 1,000 people. Contrary to popular belief, the Pawnees spent most of the year in these large round houses made of timbers, poles, grass, and earth. The traditional tipi was used by the Pawnee only as a

temporary shelter during spring and fall bison hunts. The village overlooked a broad river valley to the east where the women grew corn, beans and squash. Today there is a fine visitor's center on the site which houses an excavated lodge measuring some 50 feet in diameter.

It was hard for me to imagine these very plains as an endless sea of grass without all our modern-day fences, roads and towns dotting the landscape. But while the plains now bear little resemblance to their former selves, the wind has not changed. It still comes unhindered from thousands of miles away with what could only be described as a sweet deliciousness. If you smell, feel, *taste* the wind and let your imagination roam, you might be able to catch a small glimpse of what this country was like for thousands upon thousands of years before the white man came.

If you're ever sleeping in a tube tent, and you want extra coziness, *don't* seal off one end. Near the Texas border I did just that and woke up with a soaked sleeping bag. It seems that — with no air circulation — your breath condenses and runs down to soak anything that happens to touch the plastic. To complicate matters the day was cloudy, damp and cold. It was one of those days which is bound to happen on any trip — a day which is rather uninteresting, very uncomfortable . . . but extremely necessary to give some sort of perspective to things. What is joy without sorrow? Pleasure without pain?

The west side of Texas is covered by the Llano Estacado, or Staked Plains. No one knows the origin of the name. Some say it's from the stake-like stalks of the yucca plants. Others say it's from the necessity of using stakes to mark the trails across that featureless land. The eastern edge of these plains forms a steep escarpment through which the Red River flows in a canyon called Palo Duro. There Palo Duro State Park was located — my planned camping place for the night.

Palo Duro is historically important for a massacre which occurred there in 1874. A number of Comanche, Cheyenne, and Kiowa families sought refuge there from the squalor of the reservations. Five columns of soldiers descended on the