The Trials and Tributes of a Soil Scientist Trainee

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These past 10 weeks have proved to be a most interesting and rewarding experience. My training is far from complete, but a good beginning to a better understanding of soils. I've driven a thousand miles throughout Walton County, Fla., and have observed most of our soil series. I've walked, it seems, just about as many miles (so my feet tell me). I've encountered innumerable hazards: the blazing heat of the sun, stifling humidity, venomous snakes, spiders, blood-dependent insects of all shapes and sizes, drenching rains, violent thunderstorms. I have walked through places that only a madman would enter.

I've encountered a hostile shotgun-wielding landowner, suffered an infinite number of bloodletting scratches from thorns, barb wire, and other invisible objects. I've ruined my boots which now contain punctures from whatever likes to chew leather. I've torn shirts, pants, and even underwear. There was a day when I thought a coral snake had almost ended my career. I'm sure I developed a few gray hairs from that experience. I've sweated enough to fill a small pond, and almost succumbed to the relentless scorching sun and humidity.

There were days when I searched the back of my throat for moisture only to discover the sensation of having swallowed a ball of cotton. Not to mention the twisted ankle, bent fingers, and bruises from falling over hidden vines that leave you sprawled over the countyside. When I think of the yellow jackets that left their stingers above my eye, I can vividly recall asking myself, "why didn't I become a lawyer or a dentist?" Who am I? I am a soil scientist.

When I leave the field I may look like a combat-weary Marine and smell like a hog, but I feel great. To those who wouldn't understand I would appear to be related to the Marque de Sade, or just plain crazy. Alas! I know better.

I am the progeny of a Polish immigrant. I am the product from the slums of our cities. I've lived among the roaches, rats, and other vermin

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