

April 1, 1963

John Steinbeck  
c/o Viking Press, Inc.  
625 Madison Avenue  
New York 22, New York

Dear Mr. Steinbeck,

I am currently writing a book on my experience as a biological collector on the northeastern Gulf of Mexico. This area is practically virginal as far as investigations in geology and oceanography. The classifying of marine life in this section has hardly been scratched, and if it is scratched, it's done by very secretive, tight-lipped biology professors who can't bear to share their information with anyone until they come out with a world shattering paper. I find this very frustrating, particularly when I spoke to one professor, a taxonomist in invertebrate zoology who told me his time was worth six dollars an hour, and even then he would not consider me since I was not a member of the university.

I've obtained excellent instructions on how to be a business man, lots of jaz about collateral, insurance and specimen markets from biologists--- some of it came as a bit of a shocker to me--- was wholly unexpected--- but no one volunteered to give me any precise information as to the species of holothurians I find here, the varieties of ubiquitous tunicates, or what kind of tectibranchs come in sporadically and disappear in vast numbers. These animals are not in their field. They are all specialists. Some could tell me at great lengths about the blood chemistry of a lug worm, or about the nerve innervation of a batfish, or even tapeworms taken out of a shark, but anything else is of no consequence.

When I started this book, I wanted an overall picture of the marine life and topography of the northeastern Gulf of Mexico. I had not intended to write as detailed a book as Ed Ricketts BETWEEN PACIFIC TIDES. My book is centered on personal experiences such as working on shrimp boats, seine fishing with the mullet industry, and collecting beaches, but I realize now that there is a much more on this subject. I gathered more information on of fauna and the fauna's relation to the topography fishermen than I have from any literature or disc scientists. This area is about as unexplored as "Cortez". Although a number of technical papers yearly (they have to keep on receiving grants) one single book combining all the knowledge and under one heading. It's all so scattered.

I started college majoring in biology and found more fun collecting and I learned a lot more too. I've been out of school for two years, and in those two years I believe I know more about the marine life as an individual than I could have picked up in ten years of university specialization--- for which I have earned no ones' love, all the university clique resent me. I steal knowledge!

When I finish this book, which won't be too far from now, I'm thinking seriously of writing a book along the same lines of BETWEEN PACIFIC RIDES, giving extensive detail to the marine life and its ecology than my present book offers. I have an idea this will take me at least ten years to write because I'll have to do most of the investigation and reading of whatever literature is available, myself. But I would appreciate any suggestion you wish to offer. The northeastern Gulf is the last frontier of wilderness, guarded from tourists, neon lights, motels, hobby shops, shell, juice stands and the like. The reason for the lack of uglification is that we have crooked sheriffs, speed traps, occasional suicides with unexplained gun shot wounds, cracker Southerners with their shacks, both Negro and white qually sorry, set in their ways and they all hate outsiders. Even the Governor of Florida has tried to put up a campaign to make the natives polite to tourists, but he has failed dismally.

And I wouldn't change it for the world. I don't want to disturb the ecology. As I quote you from the SEA OF CORTEZ out of context, "it will bloom with a Floridian ugliness," if all these insanitary, unpleasant factors were removed. If you are ever inclined to travel this way, I would be delighted to show you a part of Florida that has not been commercialized.

I realize as a writer that you may not want to take the time out to write me a lengthy letter, but I would appreciate any ideas or comments you can offer me. I am not moved or interested in the latest ravens of the popular authors, I only read what I like and naturally you are what I like.

Sincerely,

Jack J. Rudloe