

March 20, 1976

PRESS POOL #5 REPORT--Travel pool from Asheville Mall, etc.

Departed the shopping mall area at Asheville at 3:55 p. m. As the three helicopters circled through the Blue Ridge Mountains, they ran into a cloud ceiling below the mountain peaks and couldn't get through. The three 'copters circled for 20 minutes, hoping for a break in the clouds.

The pilot on Helo #1 told the President they couldn't get through, and the President directed they fly back to Asheville, where they landed at 4:35. As they landed, there were two motorcades--one for President Ford and one for Ronald Reagan, which was waiting the arrival of the former California Governor.

The President had a brief meeting with his advisors and was told that it would take 1-1/2 hours to get to Spruce Pine by car. His advisors suggested that he scrub the Spruce Pine appearance and go to Hickory, but the President insisted making the Spruce Pine affair saying, "Those people are waiting in the rain, and I promised I would be there".

So the President's party ran through the rain and proceeded by motorcade to Spruce Pine. It was one hour and 45 minutes, covering 70 miles. Much of the drive was through heavy fog, which kept the motorcade at a slow-to about 35 mph speed. Upon arrival, there were still 1,000 people who cheered loudly when the motorcade arrived. A local official estimated that 8000 people came to the hoedown, but most left during the rain when it appeared the President would be late. When he arrived, President Ford went through the crowd, shaking hands, then watched a performance by the Avery High Mountain Cloggers, a local mountain dancing group (who get their name because of the big shoes they wear).

More to come.