

MCCAIN'S NOSTALGIA FOR VICTORY AND RELEVANCE TOUR

I think the press is misreading McCain's plan to finish his campaign in Prescott, AZ on Monday, suggesting it's part of Obama's success at "forcing" McCain to campaign in Arizona. Sure, the tight race in Arizona has forced McCain to buy some robocalls. But the visit to Prescott—not exactly a center of population—is not likely to affect the results in Arizona. Rather, it's partly McCain's superstitious habit, and partly a concession by McCain that he's not going to win and therefore he can spend the final days of the campaign making symbolic gestures.

Consider McCain's travel plans:

Sen. John McCain will finish nearly two years of campaigning at an emotionally significant place – Prescott, Ariz., where one of his role models, Barry Goldwater, began and ended his own presidential campaign.

The next morning, he plans to vote in Phoenix, see a movie – an Election Day tradition – and await the results.

[snip]

Sen. McCain campaigns in Virginia and Pennsylvania on Saturday before ending the day with an appearance on "Saturday Night Live." On Sunday, he returns to New Hampshire, where he won big in the 2000 Republican primary and staged a remarkable comeback to win again there in this year's primary. It will be his final town hall meeting. He winds up at a late-night rally in Miami.

On the final day of the campaign, Monday, Sen. McCain will make his way

across the country – from Florida, to Virginia, Pennsylvania, Indiana, New Mexico and Nevada before finishing in Prescott.

He was last there in April, at the conclusion of a biographical tour of places that were formative in his life.

"Prescott, Arizona's territorial capital, occupies a special place in the history of Arizona, and in the Goldwater legend," he said that day. "As everyone familiar with Arizona politics knows, Prescott is where Barry Goldwater formally began his Senate campaigns and his campaign for the presidency on the steps of the Yavapai County Courthouse. As his successor and in deference to his tradition, I have ended all my Senate campaigns here."

The Ohio trip yesterday made sense—it is one of the several states he needs to win, and one he actually might have a shot at (though, as with Georgia, North Carolina, Colorado, New Mexico, and Iowa, enough people have already voted that late visits may have limited value). Virginia and Pennsylvania today? Miami tomorrow? A frenzied rush through Virginia, Pennsylvania, Indiana, New Mexico, and Nevada on Monday? All of those are states that McCain needs to win (though polls show some of them to be increasingly out of reach).

But note that McCain is doing one last town hall in New Hampshire, the state that gave him two critical primary wins—after he has not done a town hall since his last one, on October 10, revealed the ugly racism his campaign's attacks on Obama have unleashed. Obama's currently got an 11-point lead in New Hampshire—the worst polling of any of the states he will visit between now and Tuesday. So it's not like McCain's visit is likely to win the state.

Now, to some degree, both the New Hampshire stop

and the Prescott stop reflect McCain's celebrated superstition. He's gotta go where he always goes (Prescott) and where he has won (New Hampshire) because they might make him lucky this time around. And Obama's just as much a fan of schmaltzy symbolism, from his announcement in front of the Old State Capitol in Springfield, IL (where Lincoln announced), and his speech in front of the Victory Column in Berlin.

But Obama's announced campaign spots all make sense electorally—all of them: Henderson, NV, Pueblo, CO, Springfield, MO today; Columbus, Cleveland, and Cincinnati, OH tomorrow; Jacksonville, FL, Charlotte, NC, and Manassas, VA on Monday. (Yeah, I realize he's not in Arizona, bmaz.)

I would suggest McCain's decision to make the sentimental stop in New Hampshire, as much as the stop in Prescott, suggests McCain knows any stumping he does this weekend will do little good. Instead, he's going to relive his glory days of surprise wins in New Hampshire; he's going to try to elevate this losing bid in hopes it might some day have the same relevance as Goldwater's 1964 presidential bid. McCain's campaign stops this weekend are about McCain and his ego, not about mobilizing Republicans to go to the polls.