

There's
something
about a
TRAIN

INTRO

Do the Hobos from Hell and for that matter, this rag, need an explanation? An intro? For interest's sake and a little bit o' history, maybe so.

It's a little muddled and muddled where the name first came up; the first "official" hobos from hell trip was a journey that five of us did from San Berdoo to Belen, New Mex in '89, which short story of you can catch a few pages further on. That story and "When I Hear That Ol' Train Whistle A'Blowin'" are both old, having already been printed in such illustrious zines as the first two issues of "Live Wild or Die!", the Earth First! Journal, The Crash Update (alternative travel rag), as well as the previous issue of this thing and probably other places as well. They and a few other bits and pieces are old news and have gotten more mileage than they deserve...but they are instructional and that helps if you're going to do the steel-on-steel thing...and so here they are again.

But I'm getting ahead of the story. By the next spring after that first group trip, folks could send away, as advertised in the EF! Journal, to this address for personalised, free info, maps, etc. on how to hop to the Round River Rendezvous near Yellowstone that summer. It was a cute idea, right? Definately tongue-in-cheek ("Ha, ha, hobos from hell") and I thought I'd get a few responses...turns out, a veritable flood of requests came in from all over (could it be that folks are getting tired of endless Gas 'N Saves and all the rest of the shit that passes for transportation in America?) The whole thing took on a life of it's own, certainly a bigger chore than expected what with lots of xeroxing and mailing costs, etc. and eventually this rag evolved out of that.

That summer eleven of us hopped from Roseville to Idaho and Montana. Sadly, no one has ever written up what turned into a highly charged, adventurous, friendly, and occasionally, scary trip-- quite memorable!

Another contingent of hobos (many; first timers) from the Northwest also hopped to Montana that summer - such a population of us that it was only natural to have an Anarchist/Hobos from Hell camp at the Rendezvous.

There's been several HFH trips since and many more experiences, more fun and adventure. Oddly, for all the fun we've had and all the writers (and non-writers, too) on these journeys, it's like pulling teeth to get stories out of anyone. Writer's block?

So...what is new



After proving his skills as a train surfer, McDonald is initiated into the Association of Train Surfers of Rio de Janeiro.

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in this issue? Fortunately, a friend, who's taken up rail riding with a passion like no one I know writes to me on a regular basis, her descriptive and invigorating tales and so I'll borrow this 'n that from her postcards and letters, and especially some of her photos. Also some photos from another friend, a recent initiate, and also, many of my shots too, a few more pieces of advice, songs, a few quips, and a big, big story by Jacob Bear about his first rail trip. It's a mix-mash that I think you'll enjoy...so, sit back, enjoy, and dammit, leave the driving up to them!

Oh, yeah, I almost forgot: "There's Something About A Train" and other little quips are courtesy of Amtrak. Not quite what the Amtrak advertising folks had in mind but it applies, don't you think? Well, it's funny, after 45 thousand miles of freight hopping, I finally, recently did my first Amtrak ride and gawd, it was mostly boring - couldn't wait to get to the freight yard (which is where I was headed)...there's something about a freight train!

When I Hear That Ol Train Whistle A blowin'



You know, it's a funny thing most usually when the subject of hoboing comes up which is a hobby of mine and I generally like to spread the word around, someone invariably says, "Gawd, didn't that go out in the '30's and whammo, aren't there big sucks out there that wanna take your head off?" Well, I might say ~~hmmmmmmmm~~... to the first part and I know where they got that second stereotype: from Yul Brenner or some such as the Bull in "King of the North" with Paul Newman as the King Hobo and all that... "Sheesh" is what I say. Don't make a mistake, the Bulls (railroad police) were bad then--I've read of attempted murder on the rails and I know a fellow who spent some time on a chain gang in Georgia in the '40's for hopping freights... but ridin' the rails in the '90's is the coolest thing, highly recommend it! Now just watch, the first time you hop you'll get killed and you'll think what idiot advice this is but here's whatz up with this boy: I've never gone to jail or received a ticket in 20 or 30 encounters with bulls and in thirty-five thousand miles have had the gas of a lifetime. Ridin' the rails is one of the more consistently adventurous things one can do, it's one of those truly American things like having sex in cars or Jazz, etc. and it's scenic and free, free, free! Hey, here's some thing Jack Kerouac says about thumbing: "...one of the biggest troubles hitchhiking is having to talk to innumerable people, make them feel that they didn't make a mistake picking you up, even entertain them almost, all of which is a great strain when you're going all the way and don't plan to sleep in hotels." So, I can see you're convinced about the wisdom of the rails, O.K., here's whatz up, how to do it: First, try and get some maps of how the

freight lines work and what companies (Southern Pacific, Burlington Northern, Santa Fe, etc.) go where but if you can't don't worry about it, it's pretty obvious--freights go through all the cities and gobs of smaller towns and gobs of wilderness areas. Second: go down to the

nearest freight yard and ask the workers about it. Say, "Hey, where's the best place to catch a northbound, eastbound, southbound, or westbound to so and so and when's the next one?" Inquire about "hot shots" and catch them if you can cuz they're the fastest. The secret is ask, ask, and ask around and don't be blown if you get bum info and miss a train or whatever. There's a thousand little things you pick up with experience that helpz a lot and after stomping around some yards you'll get the hang of it. Night time is best for avoiding the Bull, day time is alright, stay low and if the Bull stops you--be straight and friendly, show your ID. Often as not she or he will be friendly, maybe even helpful, in any case they will usually say something vague like, "Did you know riding trains is illegal? and I'd like to not see you again." Translation: hang low and hide a bit better. About getting on: it's preferable to get on before the train moves out but as often as not you'll have to catch it "on the fly", which is pretty slow if you're carrying a pack. Boxcars are darn diffucult and dangerous to catch on the move, grain cars, piggybacks, gondolas are much easier cuz of ladders that are just a big step from the ground. Look way ahead, make sure you won't stumble on anything while running alongside, concentrate, match your speed, focus--this is part of the zen of hopping--that moment and boom, you're on, there's a technique to it, be careful--safety first! as they say. Well,... there's a lot to know I guess but it's also just an intuitive fun activity that gets you around, know what I mean jellybean? So, here's some safety shit to know: When you move around always hang on and don't hang out too close to the doors of boxcars--trains jerk a lot. For that same reason always jam a spike or a piece of wood in the sliding track so the door won't slam shut. Never ever stand in between the cars, one can become moosh real quick. Always look both ways before crossing tracks, in yards especially as single cars can be moving around sometimes very silently. When possible sleep sideways near a front wall or with your feet towards the front of the train in case of a derailment (they're fairly rare) which causes the whole fucking thing to come screeching to a halt in which case you're still going 50 mph...eek!



BECKAROO BOOM BOOM RIDIN' "THE POWER"

Keep your head and have a gas and a half and I don't want to hear it if you get smooshed cuz I'm not advising you to go out and do illegal dangerous things, blah, blah, blah... Fun stuff At railroad crossings be sure and wave to all the people going by (actually you're going by, they're sitting still). Hang-out and talk with hobos and farm laborers, there's some good people there, also a few bad eggs I suppose. When there's nasty weather or going to be try and catch a ride in a locomotive or caboose, ask the engineer or caboose people first, I swear your first ride on "the power" (locomotives) will be a ride to remember! Freights can be fast but often slow too, patience is the name of the game, more than likely on any given trip you'll do a day or two of just waiting around in yards so bring some good books and relax--there's one comin' around the bend with your name on it. Women might want to take an old pee can, peeing ain't easy on a jiggling train. Make sure you've got some peanut butter and banana sandwiches and plenty of water and a warm sleeping bag and Gawd damn leave the driving up to them!



RAILROAD STATION IN SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE, MEXICO, NEAR THE TRACKS WHERE NEAL CASSADY DIED.

HOW WE GOT TO THE RENDEZVOUS



CAJON PASS

Well we were at this one good place I know under a bridge by a big turn in the tracks there - a nice shady hobo camp kicking around making jokes and reclining and practicing with our slingshot hitting things and generally waiting and enjoying ourselves and each other's company and nearby were a couple of piggybacks which were good to practice for these friendz that never hopped before but by and large we got impatient after awhile no trains so we figured we'd kick somewhere else go get some beer and so we did and got ourselves under a wonderful old cottonwood in another place by the tracks beating the heat as it were (hot day in San

Berdoo) and woo woo wouldn't you know it goes by a train where we'd just been so we jumped up and scrambled our packs on and hustled and bustled fast as we could which is not very fast with packs on all excited over to where that big curve comes around and whamo! what a sight it's a fucking military convoy train sheesh I think we're feeling a little doubtful about it but we figure what the heck let's get on cuz it's our train and it's starting to roll and this is always the exciting moment getting on and woo woo what a gas gawddamn we got on that train and jammed our packs under the wheels and stuff grining at each other Mary and Ken and I under our radar truck or some such and Todd and Candace under an ATT or PTA or whatever the army calls those things...and all anti-climatic like it stopped some few hundred yards on with two camoflage army guys running down the tracks (one with a big stick) and they say get off our stuff (we could say something smart ass like it's our stuff too) but we said like sure nothin' personal we'll get off and they say we don't mind you riding on the other (non-military) stuff and we say yeah and woo woo the train starts up and darnit we didn't have time to scramble off and zoom we're on our way and we're yelling yeah yeah yeah! I knew this part would be fun cuz the Cajon Pass is pretty spectacular and I'm not sure there's all that many things more invigorating than tooting on through those rocks and tunnels riding on camoflage machines on a fucking freight with friendz their first time...so eventually the train did stop



somewhere in the desert and we obliged the soldiers finally hopped off scrambled on along and some of those military men were standing around in their boxers on the caboose (which was in the middle of the train) I could see we'd be a sight to see to them - opposites soldiers and hobos they gave us six-packs of cold water thanx the human touch and on to some grain cars further on back and zoom here we

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go again Barstow bound and rolling yeah yeah yeah! and into Barstow that big yard we jumped off and over the fence up onto our little hill (the perfect place I swear) and yeehaw you couldn't ask for a more perfect ride so far no hitches no bulls a gorgeous Mojave sunset and a good time had by all and Candace and Ken hitch into town for fruit and beer and supplies and the guy told them that those tanks are worth 3 million a piece about 20 or 30 of them sitting there on flatcars away down from our vantage point (signs of the times?) around 11 or midnight our piggyback hot shot pulls in for refueling - this is our baby (as hobos are wont to say) and we ran down our little hill and over the fence and stand and sit around being paranoid till she pulls away and zoom! we're on our way east very fast and just one of the things I'm noticing and secretly giggling about before knocking off is my compatriots all sitting there Hobo Queens and Kings eating up all that power and the fast desert air which is just the way I was when I first hopped and still secretly am - yeah yeah yeah woo woo we're on our way to the rendezvous!

-lee

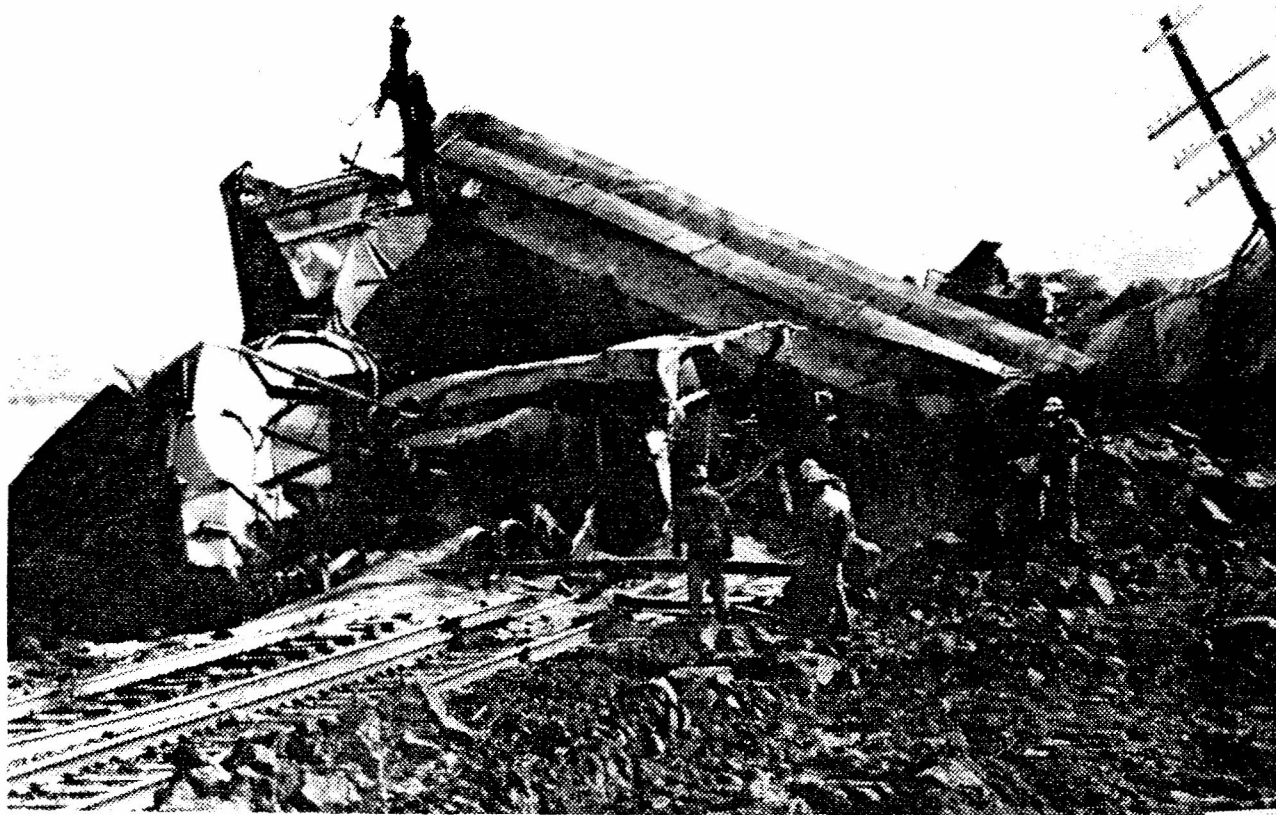
STANDARD DISCLAIMER **STANDARD DISCLAIMER** **STANDARD DISCLAIMER** **STANDARD DISCLAIMER**

RIDING THE RAILS IS DANGEROUS AND ILLEGAL. To hear the freight companies tell it, zillions of hobos get smooshed every year. It's reasonable to assume it's in the companies better interests to discourage the practice by emphasizing the danger. But dozens (maybe even hundreds) of people are dismembered and killed every year on the freights... Still I think it's way safer than hitching and who knows, it may be safer than riding in an infernal combustion machine altogether. There are myriad dangers out there of course... so, it is a matter of acceptable risks, keeping your wits about you, knowing your limitations, being a good judge of (others') character, etc. etc. I suspect that a far amount of creamed hobo is the result of drinking and hopping--seems common sense would keep the two a far distance apart... In short, be very safety conscious!

So to make a long disclaimer short, nothing in this rag is presented to encourage or discourage you from riding the rails. I'm not advising anyone to do dangerous, illegal activities, blah, blah, blah...

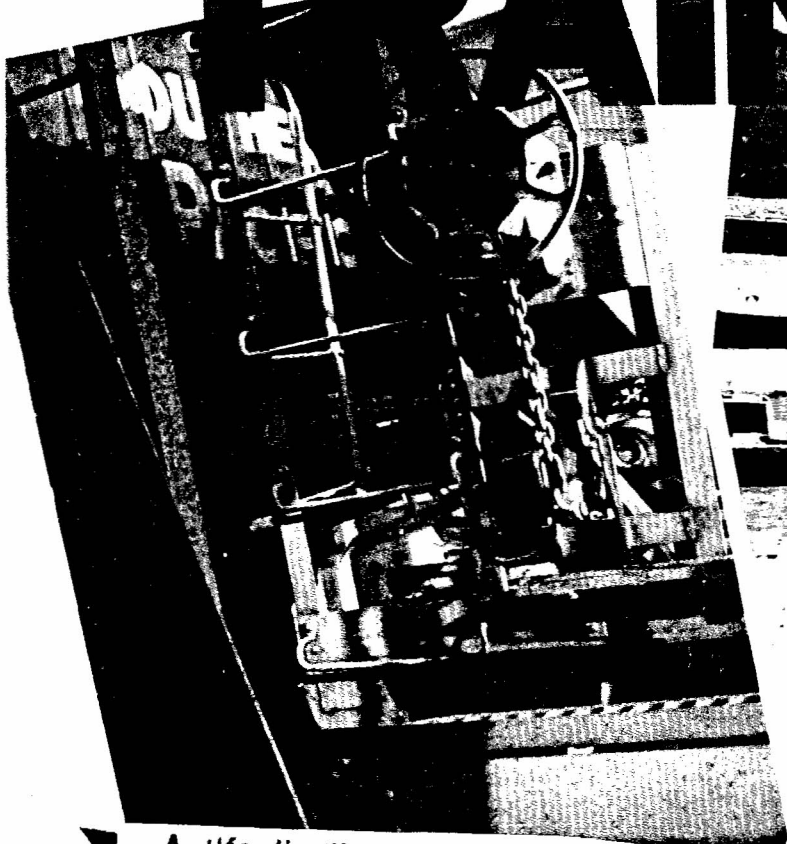
---ENJOY---

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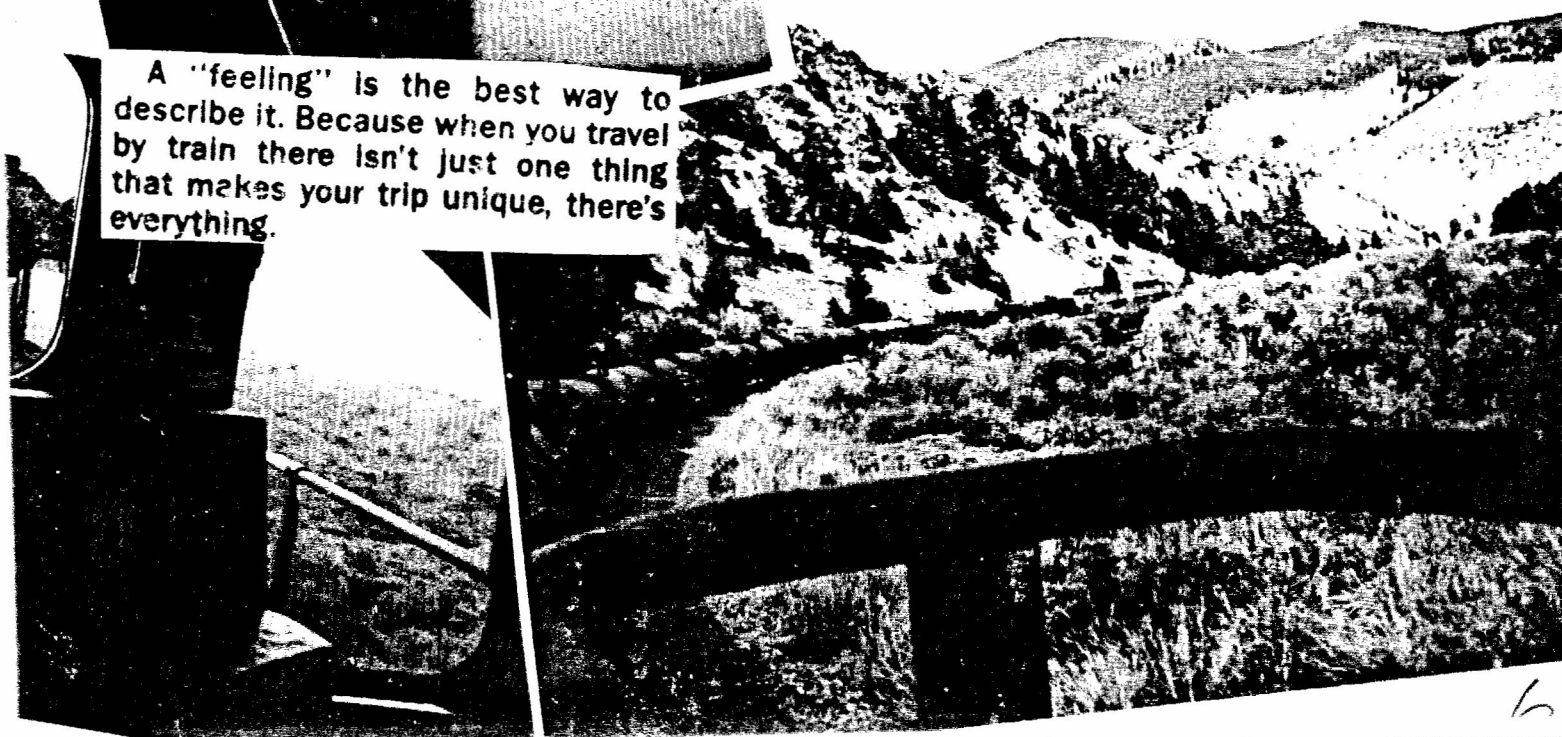


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There's something about a TRAIN



A "feeling" is the best way to describe it. Because when you travel by train there isn't just one thing that makes your trip unique, there's everything.



Canadian
rides up there as opposed to the east coast
Hotos from Hell is a great goofy idea, I hope
you stick with it. In any event, I hope to see
train surfers flirted with death



ABOUT MAPS

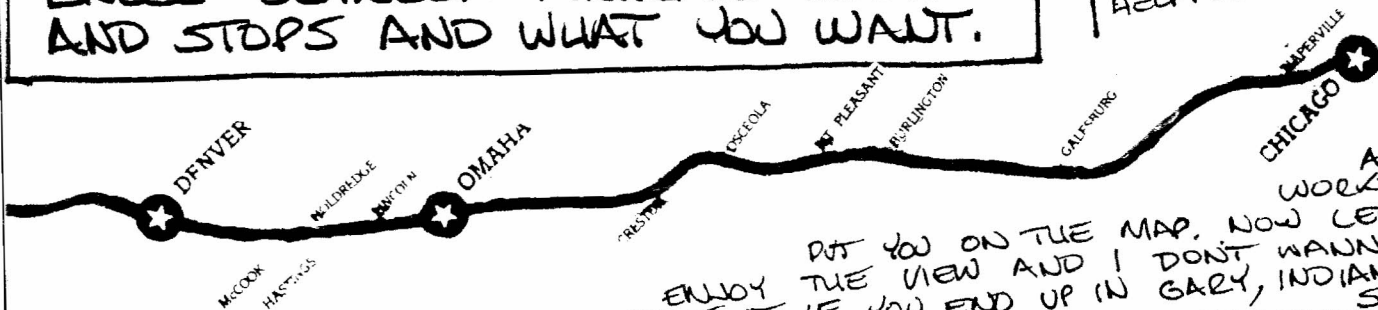
WELCOME TO THE RAILS... IT'S FUN ADVENTURE AND YOU'RE FREE, FREE, FREE! A BIT OF MAP INFO CAN HELP SPEED YOU ON YOUR WAY AND CAN MAKE FOR LESS ZIGS WHERE YOU SHOULD HAVE ZAGGED!

CITY MAPS: SOME (NOT ALL) CITY MAPS OF THE GAS STATION - AUTO CLUB VARIETY ARE VERY HELPFUL FOR LOCATING THE WHEREABOUTS OF FREIGHT YARDS AND WHICH DIRECTION THE FREIGHT LINES RUN.

AMTRAK MAPS: THE L.A. TO SEATTLE, S.F. TO CHICAGO ROUTES DEPICTED IN THIS SPREAD ARE FROM AMTRAK BROCHURES. THESE ARE JUST TWO OF MANY AMTRAK ROUTES THAT ARE NEARLY IDENTICAL TO "MAIN LINE" FREIGHT ROUTES. MANY AMTRAK BOARDING STATIONS ARE ROUGHLY EQUIVALENT TO "CREW CHANGES," REFUELING STOPS AND MAJOR AND MINOR FREIGHT YARDS. VERY HELPFUL BUT SHOULD BE TAKEN WITH A GRAIN OF SALT AS THERE ARE SOME NOTABLE EXCEPTIONS AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AMTRAK ROUTES AND STOPS AND WHAT YOU WANT.

CAUTION: BEAR IN MIND THAT ALL THESE MAP RESOURCES WERE HARDLY DESIGNED WITH HOBOING IN MIND & WHAT'S NOTABLE OR BIG FOR FREIGHT COMPANIES AND TOURISTS COULD JUST END YOU UP IN PODUNK... IN WHICH CASE YOU JUST BETTER BREAK OUT THE OLD THUMB AND DUST IT OFF. FOR INSTANCE NEITHER OF MAPS IN THESE THREE PAGES SHOW ROSEVILLE (JUST EAST OF SACRAMENTO) AND YET ROSEVILLE IS THE BIGGEST FREIGHT YARD IN THE WESTERN U.S. - A MAJOR CROSS-ROADS FOR HOBOS & ONE YOU COULD HARDLY IGNORE IF YOUR JOURNEYS TAKE YOU TO OR THROUGH CALIFORNIA. COMBINING MAPS IS HELPFUL AND THAT COM-

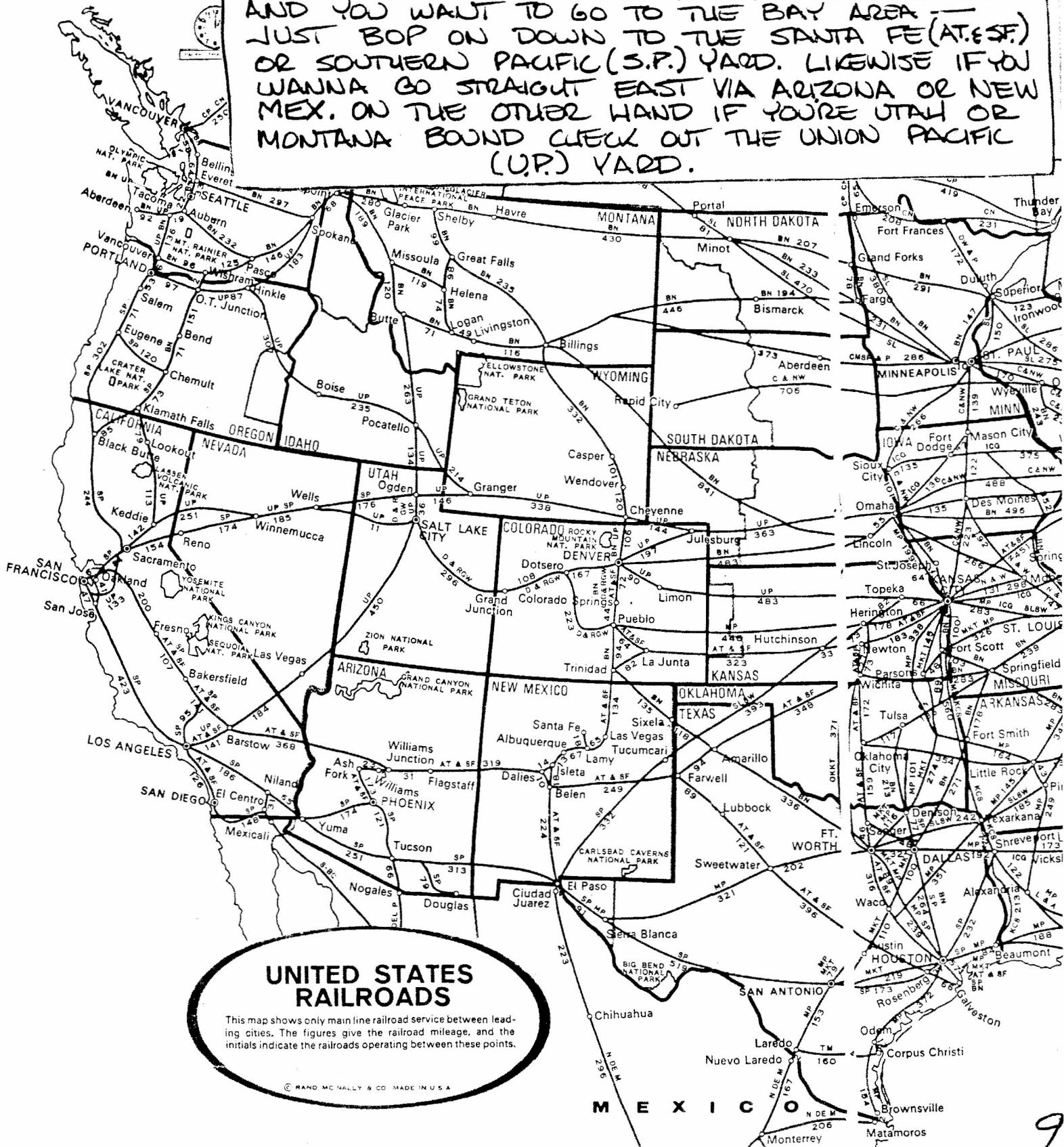
BINED WITH INFO GLEANED FROM EXPERIENCED OTHER HOBS AND YARD WORKERS WILL LEAN BACK, IF YOU END UP IN GARY, INDIANA. SEE YA!



PUT YOU ON THE MAP. NOW LEAN BACK, ENJOY THE VIEW AND I DON'T WANNA HERE ABOUT IT IF YOU END UP IN GARY, INDIANA. SEE YA!

TOPO MAPS: TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS CAN BE ESPECIALLY USEFUL IN THAT THEY SHOW IN DETAIL THE LAYOUT OF RAIL YARDS; WHICH SPECIFICS ARE SAAVY FOR WHERE IN THEM BIG OL' YARDS TO "CATCH OUT." TOPOS CAN BE FOUND AND XEROXED IN THE MAP ROOM SECTION OF MOST UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES. KEEP IN MIND THAT SOME TOPOS ARE OLD AND THE FREIGHT SITUATION MAY BE CHANGED SOMEWHAT.

ATLAS MAPS; THE U.S. FREIGHT MAP SHOWING THE "MAIN LINES" IN THIS SPREAD IS FROM THE RAND-McNALLY "HANDY RAILROAD ATLAS". YOU CAN LOOK UP ALABAMA TO WYOMING — A STATE BY STATE GUIDE AS IT WERE. INFORMATION AS TO WHAT COMPANIES (AS INDICATED BY THE INITIALS) SERVE WHAT ROUTES IS IMPORTANT. FOR EXAMPLE; IF YOU SHOULD FIND YOURSELF IN THE 10 MILE COMPLEXITY KNOWN AS THE L.A. FREIGHT YARDS AND YOU WANT TO GO TO THE BAY AREA — JUST BOP ON DOWN TO THE SANTA FE (AT & SF) OR SOUTHERN PACIFIC (S.P.) YARD. LIKEWISE IF YOU WANNA GO STRAIGHT EAST VIA ARIZONA OR NEW MEX. ON THE OTHER HAND IF YOU'RE UTAH OR MONTANA BOUND CHECK OUT THE UNION PACIFIC (U.P.) YARD.

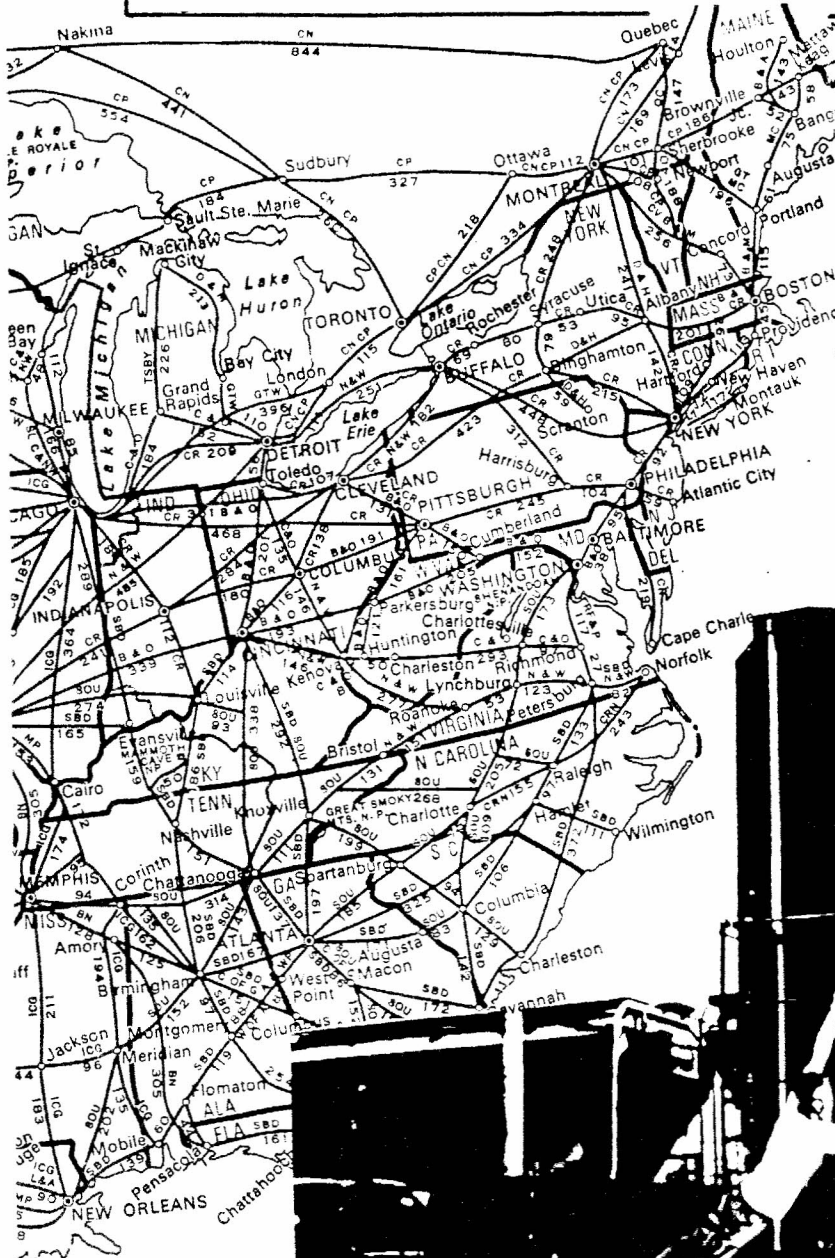


KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS TO RAILROADS

A. & W. P. Atlanta and West Point
A. T. & S. F. Atchison, Topeka
and Santa Fe
B. & A. Bangor and Aroostook
B. & M. Boston and Maine
B. & O. Baltimore and Ohio
B. N. Burlington Northern
C. & N. W. Chicago & North
Western
C. & O. Chesapeake and Ohio
C. N. Canadian National
C. of G. Central of Georgia
C. P. Canadian Pacific
C. R. Consolidated Rail
CR. N. Carolina and
Northwestern
C. V. Central Vermont
D. & H. Delaware and Hudson

D. & M. Detroit and Mackinac
D. & R. G. W. Denver and Rio Grande
Western
D. W. & P. Duluth, Winnipeg
& Pacific
F. del P. Ferrocarril del Pacific
F. E. C. Florida East Coast
G. T. Grand Trunk
G. T. W. Grand Trunk Western
I. C. G. Illinois Central Gulf
K. C. S. Kansas City Southern
L. & A. Louisiana & Arkansas
L. I. Long Island
M. C. Maine Central
MILW. Milwaukee Road
M. K. T. Missouri-Kansas-Texas
M. P. Missouri Pacific
N. & W. Norfolk and Western

N. de M. National de Mexico
OK. K. T. Oklahoma, Kansas and
Texas
Q. C. Quebec Central
R. F. & P. Richmond, Fredericks-
burg and Potomac
S.-B. C. Sonora-Baja California
SBD. Seaboard System
S. I. Spokane International
S. L. Soo Line
S. L. SW. St. Louis Southwest
SOU. Southern
S. P. Southern Pacific
T. M. Texas Mexican
T. S. BY. Tuscola and
Saginaw Bay
U. P. Union Pacific
W. of A. Western Ry. of Alabama



On a train you'll see sights you couldn't see from 33,000 feet up. You'll meet people you'd never get the chance to meet from behind the wheel of your car. You'll pass areas you could only get to with a backpack and a sturdy mule. And for a change, getting where you're going will be part of the fun and not just a way to get to the fun.



My friend, Jacob, recently turned me on to this story of an ambitious rail journey he and a friend pulled off last spring...ambitious cuz they were both brand-new to the scene. Jacob came back with a street wiseness I hadn't seen in him before, something you can get a glimpse of here.

It took me a couple of paragraphs to get into it---Jacob's got an interesting style of mixing political rant, wu-wu-spiritual stuff, and adventure - a roller-coaster story that takes some getting used to...but I like it, I like it a lot! Am quite blown & was on the edge of my seat, so to speak... I think you'll enjoy it too.

-lee

HEAR THE WHISTLE...

Whooh whooh! Whooh whoooooo.....

Kathunk!

Kathunk.

Kathunkathunkathunkathunkathunk...

by Jacob Bear

BAW!!!

And the train rolls into the tunnel. Into the darkness. Into the unknown. Unknown. What will become of a planet in her death throes? What will I do, refusing to be a part of the destruction? Every day I live, I just consume more and tread a path deeper on the face of the earth. No matter how lightly I step, I am on the train of human history, an unstoppable juggernaut of development rolling our world into the darkness of oblivion.

BAW! BAWAAAAA!

Into the constricting, stifling tunnel. Our vision and horizons narrow. Species vanish, narrowing the extent and value of Life, robbing us of unknown wisdom and spiritual growth, stifling the life force. Who can see it? Who can know, locked into the work-rest-work-rest cycle of industrial civilization? Few people still have the wild sense of adventure that once made the world a magical place. When our primary sense organ is a television antenna, how will anyone understand the power of a mountain alive with virgin forest? I'm caught in society's tunnel vision. What sort of life can I have in a world reduced to formulae, painstakingly managed from behind desks in buildings that lack openable windows?

Whooh whooh!

Hear the call of the whistle, the light at the end of the tunnel. Is there an end to the tunnel? Hear the call of heroes like Woodie Guthrie, heroines like Boxcar Bertha Thompson. Hear the call of a time not far in the past when people fought against injustice, risked death in order to feel truly alive, breathed deep of the cold, free air.

Hear the call that is an echo of a deeper cry, the wail of Coyote, Wolf, Shaman. The wailing of the wild Earth that once held us in her lap and made us strong with her primordial energy. Find the wild spirit that still sleeps in your very own soul.

Baw! Baaw!

Wake up! There might be a way out, a light at the end of the tunnel. Get off the tracks! Don't let the law of machinery and regulation bind you. Howl at the stars. Free your wild self before you're crushed by the steel onslaught of the roaring train Apocalypse. If we learn again to love what is wild, to embrace our fears, to seek the mysteries that we'll never understand, maybe we can save our world. Maybe we can save ourselves.

I was there. My friend, Eric, and I went out and hopped freight trains, and it was a start of something bigger. It was an act of defiance and an act of desperation. We fled from a world that offered us no hope and no worthwhile choices. We were on a quest for alternatives, for adventure and excitement, and for a chance to rediscover a bit of the wildness that our world so desperately needs.

A handful of bus rides took us to the Richmond BART station. She told us to ride yet another bus, and when we asked how to walk there, she said, "I want you guys on the bus." It was dark by now, and she sounded worried.

During a bus ride that couldn't have lasted more than ten minutes, I counted half a dozen sirens and at least two police cars. "This is a dangerous neighborhood," said an old woman next to me, as we neared our stop. "At least one person gets shot here every day."

Good thing it's nighttime, I thought. Probably they've already filled the daily quota of murders.

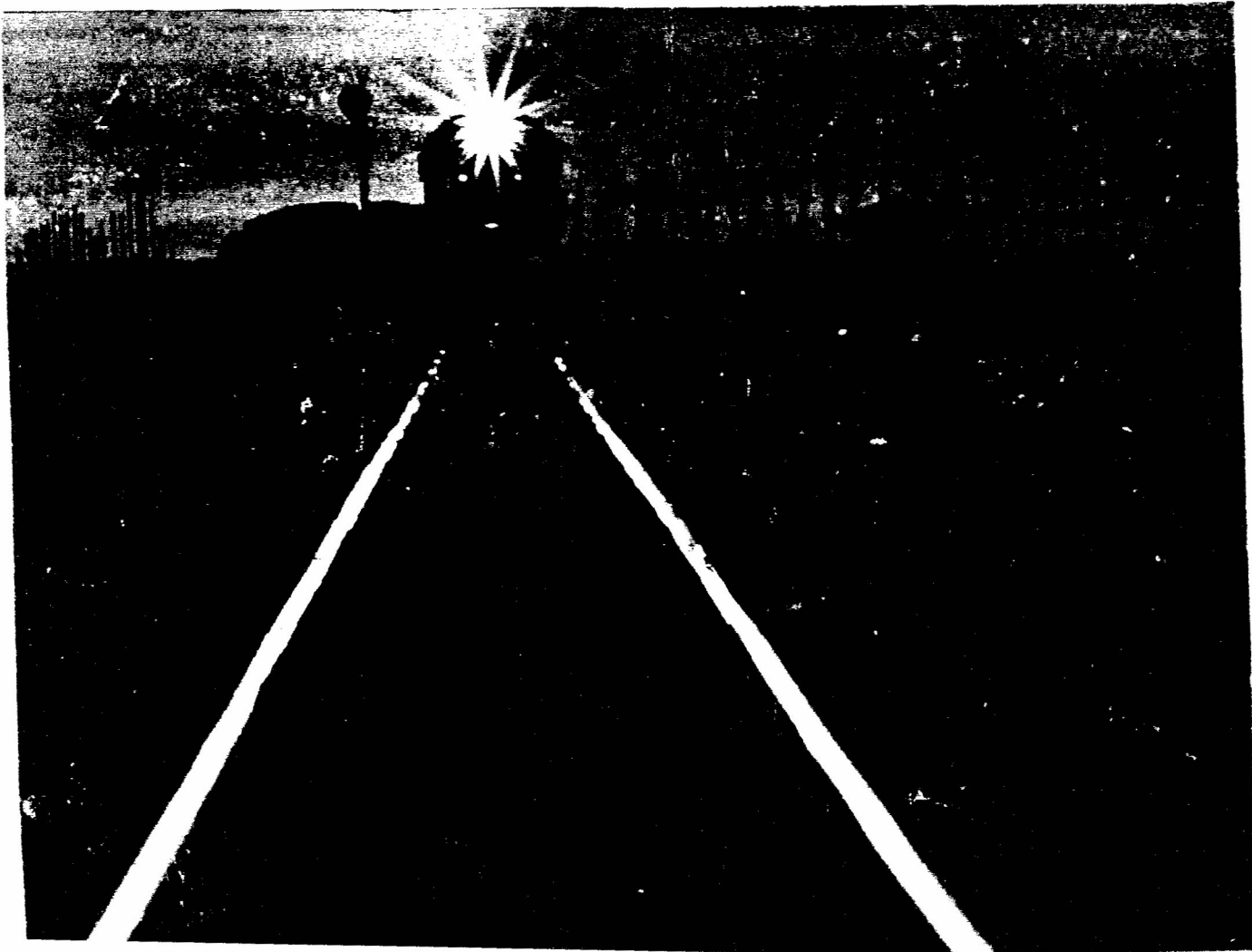
But we hadn't been off the bus for more than two minutes when I heard a BAM! BAM! BAM! of gunshots--O MY GODDESS! --right across the street! I looked at a ditch filled with water, thinking how cold I would be if I dove in for cover. Maybe it would be better to die than to be too cold...

"I'm getting bad vibes about this place," said Eric.

We took refuge in a weedy vacant lot, checked our topography maps, and figured out how to get into the yard. Twenty minutes later, as we walked along the tracks towards an opening in the fence, I spotted a steady yellow light moving towards us. A train! Our very first one!

As it came close, the ground shook, and I witnessed a train's true power for the first time. Although they're built and run by people, trains transcend mere technology. They are dragons, volcanoes, a raw elemental force of nature that rampaged through the astral world long before the first railroad tracks were ever laid. The locomotives we see are just physical iron garments, tailored in a mysterious collaboration between machinery and the supernatural.

And now this primal energy, the stuff of earthquakes and dinosaurs, a steel-clad hurricane, was bearing down on me in power and thunder and dazzling light; an earthy rumble of might and motion and the ear-splitting BAW! of the horn. And I ran--I ran not from this mountain of awe and terror but towards it, next to it, along its side, seeking to fuse gargantuan velocity to my own mortal speed.



I stumbled and dropped my bag and scraped my skin as Eric shouted above the noise, "It's going too fast." We let it pass, and continued into the yard. When another train approached we stepped aside and waved politely to the engineer.

Lo and behold! A miracle! The train slowed down in a spectacle of metal creaks and hisses, and stopped with a deep rumble. Fear tingled through me in the unexpected quiet, and the train sat silently alive in the night, daring us to board.

We chose ourselves a "piggyback," a truck trailer mounted on a flat car. We hid ourselves between the wheels of the truck when a man came past us with a flashlight, and I braced myself against a tire as the train started up again.

Soon we were deafened by the roar and thunder, and we hugged each other and cheered, and we were off! We were off zooming through the night, past the distant lights of towns, past the flaming gasses and smoky hells of nightmarish industrial parks, through endless petroleum-smelling tunnels where I feared carbon monoxide poisoning; onward onward onward, now into farmland and vast peaceful stretches of field and crop; onward as I sat up breathing deeply of the cold rushing starlit air, drinking the power of the night; onward and onward at a racing clip for glorious hour upon hour until I finally pulled out my bedroll and slept, slept although I didn't want to rest because I knew I would need energy for whatever bright early morning future lay ahead, even now rushing towards me on the same steel rails of destiny.

I woke up at dawn from the feel of the train slowing to a stop. We coasted into a railyard, and I ducked just in time to avoid being seen by a man with a radio. Eric woke up, and we sat still as the care gave a lurch and the engines were disconnected. Then a second shock passed through the train, and we were suddenly moving backwards.

"What's going on?" asked Eric.

"I don't know. Maybe they saw us."

We stopped, lurched, pulled forward again, then went backwards again.

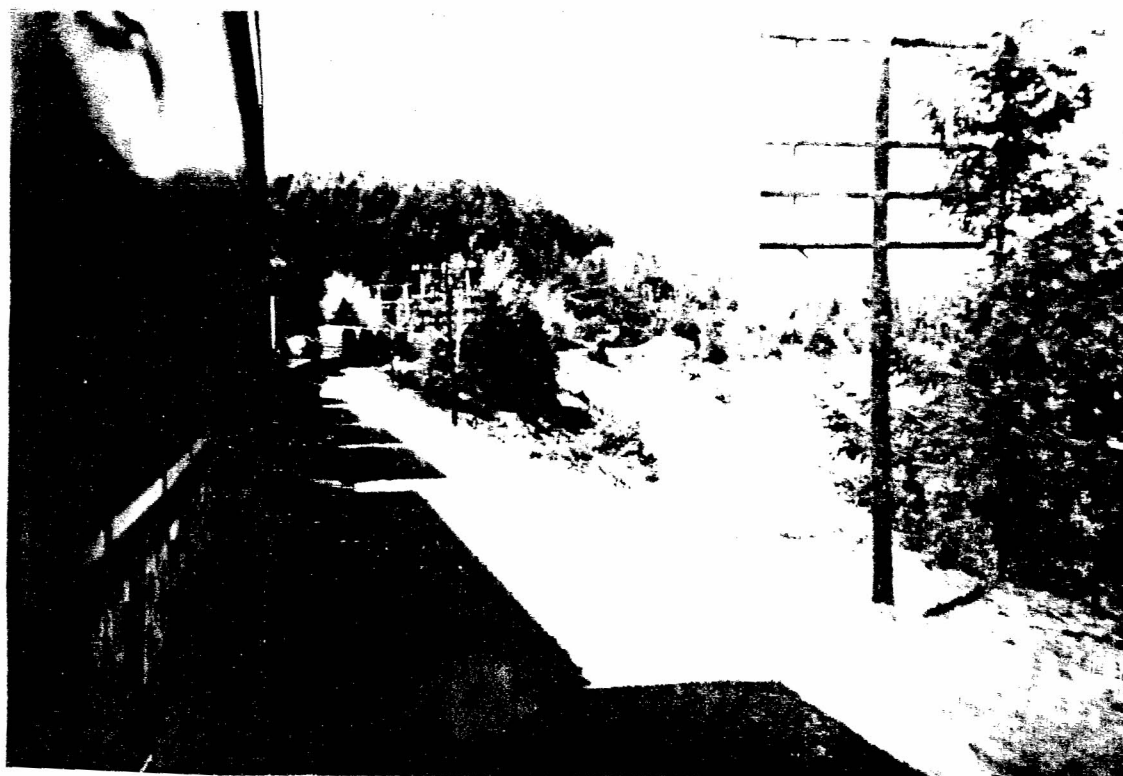
"They aren't doing all this for our benefit," said Eric, and he went back to sleep.

I made myself comfortable between the wheels. I munched on some dried fruit and granola. The sun rose higher in the sky, and I welcomed the warmth it brought. The previous night had been cold and windy. As our train rolled and swayed, apparently with the loading and unloading of cars, I dozed off. I woke up, wrote letters to a couple of friends, and finally, with a high-pitched

creak, we sped forward and left the yard.

In daylight I saw why the wind had felt so strong the night before: there was no truck on the space in front of us; just a flat car like a huge skateboard. Eric sat upon it now, and I hurriedly crawled out to join him.

The ride was glorious! Wind blew into my face and hair from every direction, and I felt as if I rode a great flat roller coaster as the ground sped beneath us. I waved



to the cars that stopped to let us pass, and felt I was on a higher plane than they; a great railriding hobo deity, flying free through stagnated civilization on an animated throne. We passed a golf course and waved to wealthy southern Californians who frowned in surprise and disgust. I felt proud to be a sloppy bum, riding with joy on the Tracks of Life, free of the need to squander land and water in the creation of foolish games for my amusement. We passed a police car, and I chuckled to think that we couldn't be stopped, even though we were blatantly breaking the law.

I picked up my ocarina to play a tune, but the wind countered the force of my breath, and the small clay pipe lay soundless. So I sang instead, and though my voice was ripped away by the speed of the train, song welled up inside of me like a fire that wouldn't be quenched.

I took a nap during our next stop. After we continued on our way, and had been moving for some time, I decided to get a look at the country we were passing through, and I crawled out of my hiding place.

Moments later I was gasping in disbelief and crying out in joy. "You're so beautiful!" I marvelled at the land. "I love you!" I shouted aloud.

The canyon through which we passed seemed to sizzle with electricity. The rocks were a rusty golden silvery grey metallic hue that is difficult to describe. Rounded boulders and jagged edges held gnomish faces which seemed to speak. Sparse vegetation seasoned the landscape in a colorful symphony of browns and greens. The train wheels squealed with a low, human moan, haunting the place with a mysterious life, surreal with fearful consciousness.

Through winding switchbacks we climbed higher into an enchanted dreamworld.

Blue-green grasses robed the silver hilltops, while bright wildflowers of fiery color adorned the rippled land like jewels. Streams and creeks bubbled down steep stony beds in raw rugged beauty.

"This is probably what most of the world was like, before white men took over," said Eric.

I don't remember whether I replied, for I was mesmerized by the spirit of the place. This land was alive! I could feel its awesome, daunting wisdom through a sense beyond the senses. The circling hawks and flowing streams and every living creature and even our own train snaking its way through this Elysium, all of these things were part of a grave and ancient voice that spoke to me and danced in me with words I'll always know but will never have the power in myself to utter.

It grew dark. We passed Mojave and Tehachapi, and eventually reached the town of Barstow. As we pulled into the yard, I saw the fence running parallel to the band of tracks, just as I had been told. Before our trip began, our friend and "railroad guru", Lee, had described this and a few other yards. The train now stopped, and by some inexplicable luck we were lined up



perfectly with an opening in the fence.

On our way to this town, Eric had commented, "We know how to get on a train, now, but how do we get off of one?"

"I guess we just get off and leave the yard as quickly as possible," I answered.

So now we picked up our baggage and were through the fence within seconds. On the other side was a steep hill, with brush planted at the top for a wind break. In less than a minute we were at the top, pushing our bags across a shallow trench and into the shrubbery.

Yet soon we would learn of the relentless bulls at Barstow. Within seconds we were blinded by a flood of searchlights. We dove into the ditch, and lay still while the bushes lit up around us. When the lights were gone, we crawled through the shrubs and crept down the other side of the hill to make plans.

Water was our first priority, and we saw lights, presumably from houses, in the distance. We hiked across a sandy plain dotted with desert plants. I was grateful that we weren't caught here in the daytime under a roasting sun. We came to a suburban street and were accosted by two little girls and a dog. The girls went inside to get their mother, who wouldn't give us water, apparently horrified by our grubby, travelworn appearance.

At another house we heard someone playing drums in the garage. We rang the doorbell and knocked on the garage door several times, but the drummer couldn't hear us. Finally I turned on the garden hose, and then a man came out. He spoke to us and was friendly, but he was obviously suspicious as well. He and his dog watched us until we were out of sight.

When we got back to the railyard, we climbed the hill and peered through the bushes. A large train, obviously set to go far, was just rulling out on the mainline.

"Quick, J-Bear, let's hop it!" shouted Eric.

I was tired, scared, and reluctant. But I ran down the hill and climbed the fence, and crossed several empty tracks, and ran alongside the roaring Levaiithon. It seemed louder and more violent and powerful than anything I had ever seen before, and fear drained the will out of my limbs. I put one hand out on a spine car, ready to grab on, and the speed of the train spun me around. "It's too fast," said Eric.

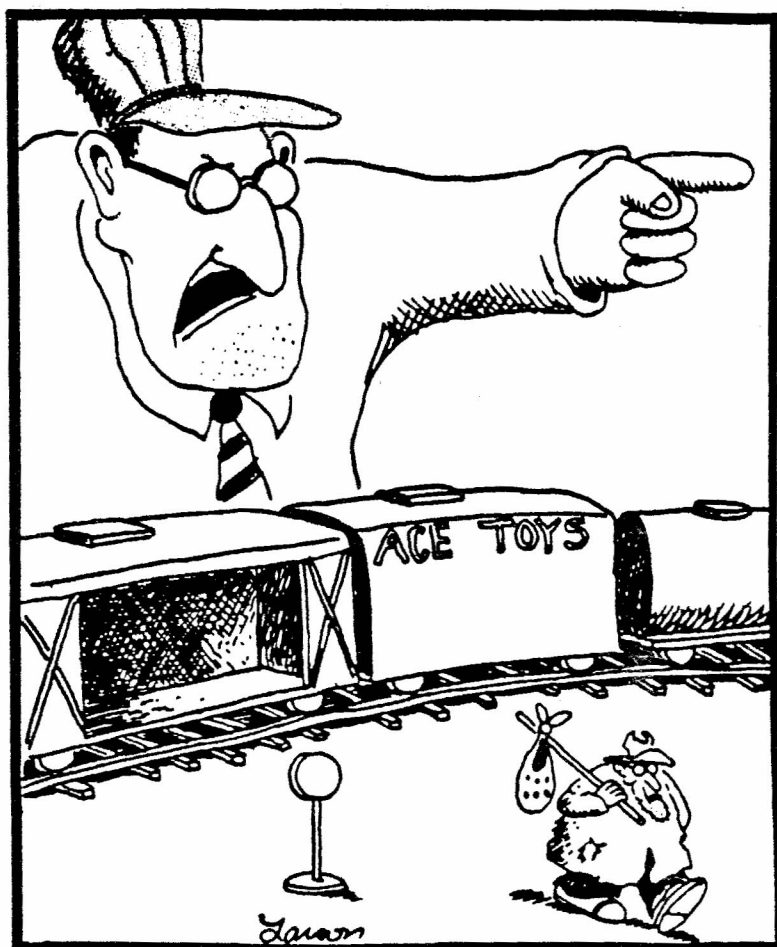


Dejected and defeated, we slunk back up to our hiding place in the shrubs on the hill. "Lee, Lee, we need you," lamented Eric in a falsetto.

We munched on chocolate chips as we wondered what to do. It seemed incredible that anyone could ever really actually catch a train "on the fly."

Finally, we decided to go to sleep. Hidden and full of chocolate, I relaxed. Slow moving engines and single cars carried out their mysterious work below. The rails sang out in strange metallic harmonies, striking beautiful chords in the busy night. It was an oddly peaceful music, and I slowly fell asleep listening to ethereal choirs as Dinah blew her horn.

16 Early in the morning, I awoke to the feel of raindrops on my face. "We're



"And stay off."

This time we were unnoticed. But the bull kept a dutiful watch on my pom-pom. We made ourselves comfortable, ate, and took turns reading Jack Kerouac and Boxcar Bertha Thomson aloud to one another. After about an hour or so, Eric interrupted my reading to say, "J-Bear, there's a train starting up in our direction, and I see an open boxcar."

Terrified reluctance filled me in an icy deluge. I tried to cook up an excuse. "Are you sure it's a mainline train, and that it's going far?" I asked.

"This is a huge train, with four engines on it. It's going places."

Shaking with fear, I began to stuff things into my bag. Everything seemed to be happening in slow motion. Time was moving through quicksand.

"Can we still make it," I asked, "or is it going too fast now?"

"It's still moving slow enough to catch, but hurry!"

My trembling hands could barely clip the duffel bag shut, but after a few foiled attempts I did it. Then I hurled myself down the hill, threw my bag and then myself over the fence, and rushed to meet the iron tempest ahead of me.

I had always thought that fear brought a rush of adrenalin, giving strength and energy. But now my whole body was weak and numb and trembling, and blackness danced in front of my eyes. I couldn't even run away from the thundering juggernaut before me, and I was ready to collapse on the tracks and bury my head in my hands.

It was a blessed moment when I paused there, one which few people ever get to experience in this modern world of protection and convenience. How many children of the suburbs, raised as I was raised, ever escape far enough from remote control television and pushbutton phones to find themselves in a situation where their fate relies on sheer willpower, where their ability to master themselves is the one thing that can save them from being stranded, alone, far from any safe or familiar place?

The second in which I paused on the tracks is one of the few brief moments in my life of which I am truly proud. Small academic awards and honors, and other pats on the head from society, grow pale in comparison. I could have easily

in the desert," I protested, "It's not supposed to rain." But I quickly shut up when I looked below.

A bull was watching us from his van, down the road, practically underneath us. We rolled up our sleeping bags, crept back down the hill, walked some distance, and then climbed back up to view the yard from a new spot. Almost immediately, the van drove towards our new vantage point, and stopped just below us. We moved again, and were followed again. Although we were screened by a curtain of shrubbery, the bull always knew exactly where we were!

Then Eric suggested I cut the pom-pom off my hat. I laughed when I understood. I was wearing a knit cap with a bright red pom-pom in the top, shining like a beacon to any railroad police officer.

We found a pair of jeans hanging on a nearby tree, and I sewed the pom-pom onto this. We added some feathers and a short prayer to the Trickster for good luck, and propped the decoy on some sticks near the edge of the bushes. Then we picked up our bags and moved, yet again, to a new place on the ridge.

given up my personal freedom and put my destiny in the hands of Eric, or the railyard bull. Instead, I took a deep breath and conquered my fear.

I rushed to the blue boxcar with her wide open door. I tossed my duffel bag into the opening, and raised myself up after it. The doorway struck me in the ribs, I fell, I got up and ran for another try, I clawed my way in, and then I was standing in the car, and then Eric climbed in after me, and we howled above the roar and tumult of the train, and we were once again off, and on our way!

Meanwhile, a faithful yard bull kept a close watch on a bright red pom-pom, not letting down his guard for even a moment.

We had good times in that car. We drew our names and symbols with chalk in the walls. We would run the length of the car, staying even with a cactus outside and creating the illusion that the train was still. We would wave to farmers and old-timers, men who came out just to watch the trains go by and who were tickled pink to see that young boys still rode the rails. We played music, for we had with us an ocarina, a harmonica, and a recorder, plus our own voices, and it didn't matter that we couldn't hear ourselves; it was fun to simply be there in all the power and glory and absurdity of the ride.

And the freight thundered on.

I sat cross-legged before the open door, in meditation. The golden, pink, orange electric world of mesas and plains and canyons before me filled me with its power. It took me on a spaceless journey and surrounded me like a cloak until I became its spirit and its spirit became me. I would sit for hours and hours without feeling bored or uncomfortable, drinking in every detail with fascination by transcendent senses so that not a single thought disturbed the relaxed silence of my mind.

And the freight thundered on.

Our luck was excessive to the point of ridiculousness. We had hoped to ride through Arizona in a boxcar, for we would need the shelter against the snow. Yet boxcars are no longer all that common, and an open boxcar is extremely rare. Yet one had been magically sent to us, just before the part of the journey during which we would need it the most. And the timing had been perfect, for if it had come an hour sooner the bull in Barstow would have kept us away, and if it had arrived much later the bull would have had more time to become suspicious of our pom-pom decoy. Not only this, but our boxcar was painted bright sky-blue, and stood out amidst the rusty brown cars of the train as my hat stood out among the shrubs.

Our train seemed to be headed in the right direction, too. Whenever we came to a junction, we would wonder which way we were headed, and would wait anxiously for the next stop. Would we be in Needles, as we wished, or Rice? The train would slow down, and we would strain our eyes for a sign. Needles!

And the freight thundered on.

So the day passed, as well as a good part of the night. Eric slept soundly, but I was cold. Every so often I would have to get up and dance around the car until the life returned to my hands and feet. This could easily have been a chore, but in my excitement it became a joyous ritual. I would sing out loud, knowing that Eric couldn't hear me through the din of our rattling train. And once again, the power of the rushing engines, and of the land through which we rushed, would take control of me, and I would dance and leap and whirl before the open doorway, singing out chants and praises to all the spirits and gods and goddesses and forces of Creation I knew in every way I could conceive, while outside, the snow-bound, starlit, frozen terrain hurried past me in a show of unknowable existence.

And the freight thundered on.

During one of my awakenings, we were running parallel to a freeway. A sign indicated that we were only forty miles from Albuquerque. As we were moving faster than the freeway traffic, I assumed we would arrive in less than an hour. So I stayed awake long after I was sufficiently warm. Time passed, and I grew bored and restless. We pulled away from the freeway, and soon there were no lights or other signs of the approaching city.

Yet the freight thundered on. In fact, it accelerated.

I thought about the magic and mystery of this train ride. I had come to believe that this boxcar had been sent to us by a nurturing goddess. Now, I was certain that an hour had passed. We should have been at Albuquerque. I thought again of the amazing circumstances by which we had found this car, and the ridiculous coincidences filled me with a fascinated horror.

Perhaps this was a demon car, on a haunted train. We should have arrived by now. At the least, we should have been passing signs of a large city, and slowing down. Instead, we were rushing through an empty blackness, at an increasing rate. As a token of our speed, the wind blew my hat off my head, and as I groped for it, I was certain that I could hear, just beyond the countless rattles and clunks and creaks of the train, a calm, metallic, laughing whisper.

And the freight thundered on.

As I wondered what to do, Eric woke up, and shouted to me above the din, "I'm getting a bad feeling about this train. I just had a dream that I saw the engineer, and he was a skeleton with a huge leather sombrero!"

I told him of my fears, and wondered if we would ever get off this magical boxcar.

And the freight thundered on.

Darkness! Endless and complete! If I were to leap out the door off the train, would I even meet my death? I could almost believe that there was no longer ground below us, and that I would just fall and fall forever, rushing as we were now at the speed of light through infinite darkness.

And the freight thundered to a stop!

There we were, sitting in the suddenly still and silent night. Some time passed, and we finally decided to walk up and talk to the engineer, skeleton or no, and find out what was going on. But just as we gathered our bags and left the car, there was a slow, ear-splitting creak. The whole train shook, and then slowly began to move. Soon we were picking up speed again, as confused and perplexed as before.

And the freight thundered on.

Yet, somehow that mysterious stop had broken the spell. I felt safer, and crawled into my sleeping bag to rest.

Eventually, Eric shook me awake, yelling, "Albuquerque!"

I got up, and rolled up my bag. We were passing through a large town, and slowing down. When the train stopped, we got off. I wanted to howl and cheer, but kept quiet lest we draw attention.

We walked into town, and found a pay phone outside a 24-hour store. "Before I call Cyanne and tell her we're here," said Eric, "let's get something for a celebration."

We strutted down the aisles of the store, taking our time. "we're here!" "We made it!" "How about some peanut butter cookies?"

As I paid for a huge Hershey bar, Eric asked the man behind the counter, "This is Albuquerque, isn't it?"

"No, this is Winslow."

Lightning struck.

"How far away are we?"

"You've got another 250 miles to go. Are you hopping freights?"

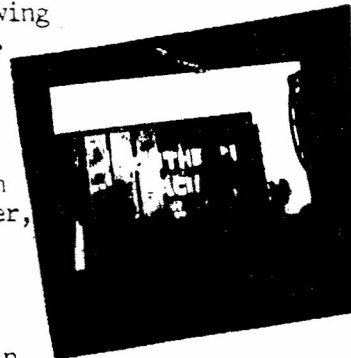
"Yep," I answered. Then to Eric, "Maybe if we run back there we can catch our train again."

"You might," said the clerk. "This is where they stop to refuel and change crew."

We were already halfway through the door when he wished us luck and said, "Don't get caught."

We raced through the streets of Winslow, trying not to think of all the time we had wasted in the store. I strained under the weight of my duffel bag, but then there we were! and there was our train, and there was our baby blue boxcar, a goddess who had led us into a troubling twist of warped time and space but had been our safety and deliverance just the same.

I remembered the chocolate bar in my hand. We carried it down to the tracks and stood silently in ritual solemnity. After giving a short prayer of thanks for our luck, we each took a bite of the chocolate. We placed the rest, with reverence, on a rail beneath the boxcar's wheel as a sacrifice to the train gods.



A white light flooded the world...

"Eric! In the car!" I yelled, and we jumped in just in time to avoid a spotlight. Not quite just in time, though. The van stopped outside our car, and the light shone in the doorway.

"J, move your bag," whispered Eric. I pushed my duffel bag against the wall, hoping the bull hadn't seen it.

Slowly, painfully slowly, the beam of light moved along the wall, inching closer to where we pressed ourselves into the side of the car. The beam stopped a centimeter away from us. I could see the shadow of the very tip of my nose, a tiny convex silhouette, on the far wall. I held my breath, and the light held still. A minute passed, and my heart pounded. Then, at a creeping, tormenting pace, the light retreated. Outside, I heard the bull's footsteps, and the crackle of his walkie-talkie.

Then I heard another sound. A slow, high-pitched creak, followed by a dull, distant rumble. And then, slowly at first but getting faster, we were moving again. Off! Into the night! Leaving behind the bull and the store, and the candybar sacrificed to the train goddess, good-bye to Winslow and hello to Albuquerque or Belén!

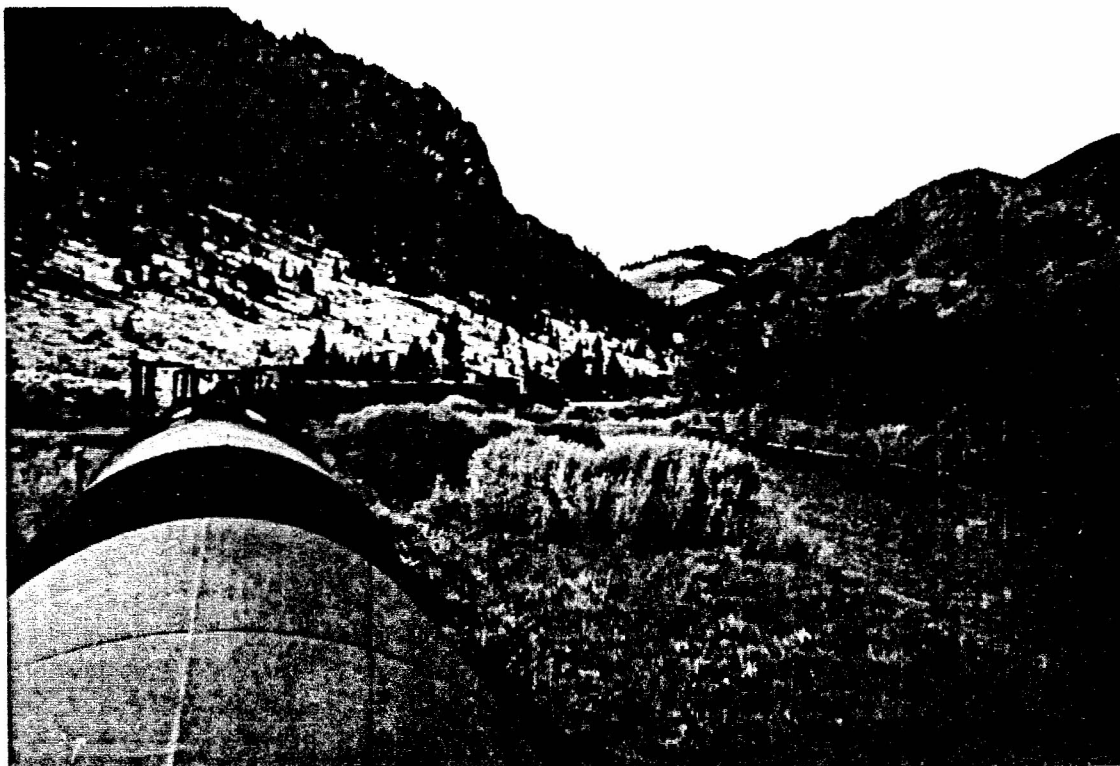
And the freight thundered on.

The next time I rose to dance my way to warmth, dawn's golden light seeped into the car. I hopped before the door, and saw an impossible, unearthly blend of light and colors. The sky was an ethereal swirl of blues, oranges, reds, golds, and mauves, set with two shiny gems in the center: the morning star Venus and the knifelike crescent waning moon of Kali. The ground beneath was the color of fresh pancakes, and the boulders that were strewn about in piles and clusters were pink!

The air was bitterly cold, and despite my awe and wonder I looked forward to the sunrise. When a golden shaft finally poured over the ridgetop, I threw back my head and sighed. The light caressed my face with a soothing warmth, like a kiss.

After a few more hours, we were in Belén. No mistake this time. We saw neo-adobe buildings everywhere, and a chili pepper laying in the road made our location indisputable.

(look for part 2, about Jacob & Eric's equally wild return journey in a future issue.)



WANDERING

Who could explain the wanderlust
The way it lured me to the rails
To travel for I felt I must
Explore at length those iron trails

It could have been that early dawn
Which shone upon the spinning steel
The beauty to which I was drawn
To gaze upon each spinning steel

It could have been that click and clack
Assaulting ears with such a din
Which made me want to soon come back
To watch the heavy steel wheels spin

It could have been that spring time breeze
Which I felt sweetly on my face
Thereafter not much could appease
My longing for that time and place

Whatever reason on that morn
I was infected from that day
My hopes upon that rail were borne
In such a very special way

Oh such a din and clatter rose
Amidst reflections to reveal
Metallic beauty with a hose
Which hung between that whirling steel

The stirrups held my willing feet
My arms a sturdy iron beam
A sight my eyes beheld so sweet
As if a wondrous waking dream

From my perspective on that car
The sky became a wondrous show
Which was so near spectacular
From first light to that dawning glow

The stuff my dream would be made of
Was close below and in the sky
In front of me to far above
A wondrous dawn would glorify

FOR A FUN BOOK
OF RAIL RIDING POEMS
(SUCH AS THE ONE ABOVE)
WRITE TO: IOWA BLACKIE
GEN. DELIVERY, NEW
HAMPTON, CHICKASAW
COUNTY, IOWA 50659

HOP HOP TO PORTLAND AND THE EF! CONFERENCE (Part 1) by Tony in Santa Cruz

There we were, sitting on our packs outside the freight yard in Roseville, CA. Five of us, three rookie hobos and two veterans, going to the Earth First! Conference near Portland Oregon. I was scared to death.

Why? Buzzing through my head were the tales and warnings that everyone has heard: falling under the train getting chopped in two, murderous hobos ripping you off and throwing you off the train, or Railroad "bulls" chasing you from car to

car trying to beat you up. And the task at hand, we had to run along side a moving train, throw our packs on and then swing up without getting killed. I kept tripping along the tracks trying to obtain a speed I thought the train might move. After stressing, questioning the hobo vets, and trying to think of everything that could happen, I sat down and waited. Waiting, I learned, is what a hobo must be best at.

It was about one o'clock in the morning and it was raining off and on lightly. Many trains started up and got us ready only to take off east toward Reno. The northbound track out of the Roseville yard takes a sharp east to north turn at the end of the yard. This enables a wise hobo to stay out of the yard where the bulls are, and catch the train moving slowly around the curve. Finally a train came around the curve, and things started happening quickly. We had it planned though; we trotted covertly down toward the curve. My instincts told me to hide when the engine came by--I didn't want the engineer to see us. However I was told that the engineers and yard workers don't really care about freight hoppers; they'll even help you sometimes. The huge engine passed us by. It shook the ground and filled the air with a rumble you could feel in your bones. I looked back at the engine as it passed and saw the spotlight moving back and forth across the tracks, illuminating the raindrops falling to the ground.

Many cars passed us by; none suitable for us to ride on. Boxcars at first, but all closed. These would have made a great refuge from the rain. As my impatience set in and I started to worry that we wouldn't get anything at all, a long line of piggybacks started coming by. Piggyback are flat-cars with truck trailers on them. We decided to hop one of these.

It wasn't as hard as I thought. We spread ourselves out so we wouldn't be tripping over each other. The train wasn't moving that fast, and the cars weren't as high as I had imagined. So after laying my pack upon the car, I just sort of hopped up and sat my butt down on the car. Everyone made it on without a problem. We were rolling!

We were rolling past houses and streets with cars waiting to pass. The rain was light on my face and it felt great! My fellow hobos were getting out their sleeping gear and laying their bags in single file along the center of the car where it was dry. The huge wheels and axle of the truck trailer acted as a wind and rain shield for those toward the front, but as you went toward the rear you could feel the droplets on your face. I didn't care much at the time, I was wrapped up warm in my rain gear and was enjoying the passing scenes.

As the hours passed I began to look back at how far I had come. I had traveled along the same highway that the train was parallel to as a youth growing up in this same valley. I had come this way to go to Portland once to visit my sister. My car had a proudly placed "Reagan/Bush" sticker on its bumper. My ignorance was immense. Here I was, eight years later bringing an animal liberation newsletter to an Earth First! Conference. My ignorance still immense, but my eyes wide open.

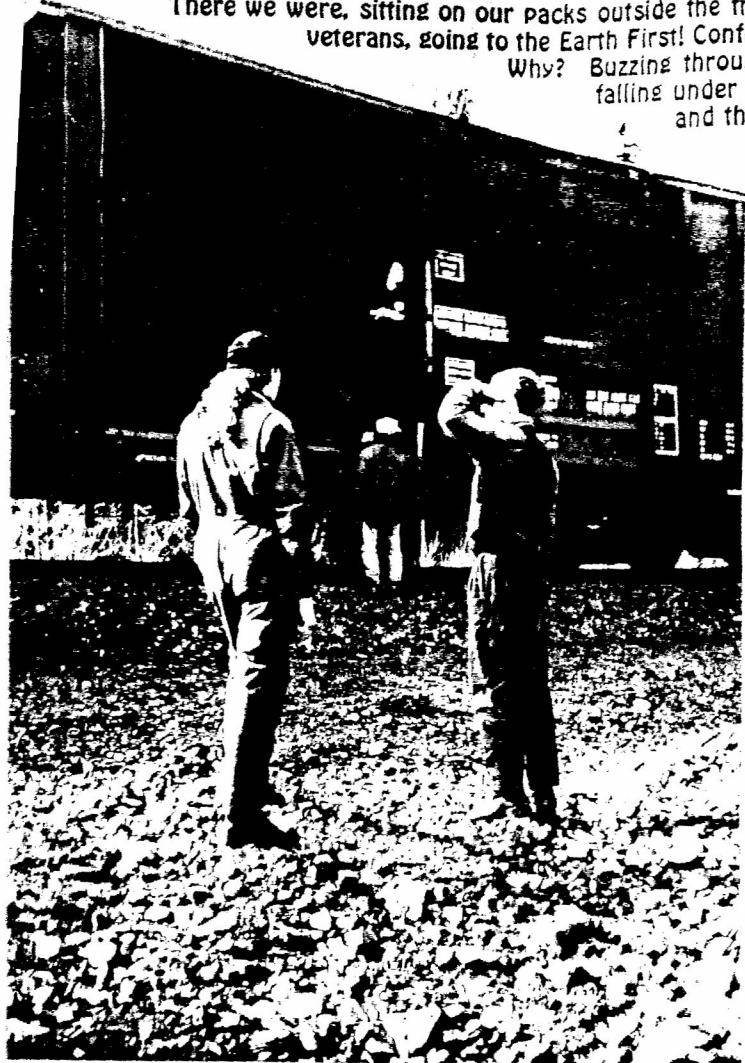
After a while I started to get wet as the rain started to pool under where I was sitting. I was also feeling very tired. I went toward the front of the car where the huge truck wheels were and squeezed in beside a fellow hobo. He was glad to give me the space. I rolled out my sleeping bag and shoved my pack up under the axle. I quickly fell asleep to the sounds of the train and the wet of the rain. It felt like freedom, riding on the train.

When the morning came, the person that slept furthest back was soaked. I was glad I had made the decision to move forward because I would have slept even further back than he did. We were all a bit wet though, and some coffee and a Laundromat to dry our clothes and sleeping bags sounded pretty good at the time.

Most northbound trains stop in Dunsmuir to refuel. We decided to hop off the train and go into town. We packed our gear up and ate a little breakfast. When the train slowed down as it came into the yard, we jumped off and walked into town. What a sight we must have been to the locals. Little did they or us know that we would be there a bit longer than expected.

To be continued!

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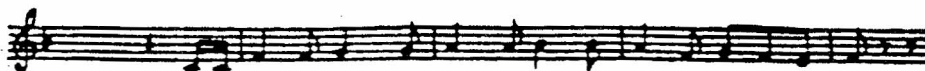


You Wonder Why I'm a Hobo

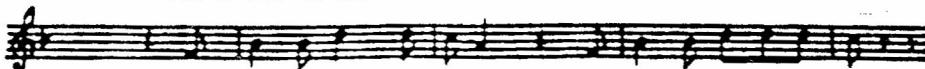
Moderately fast



You wonder why I'm a ho - bo — and why I sleep in the ditch.



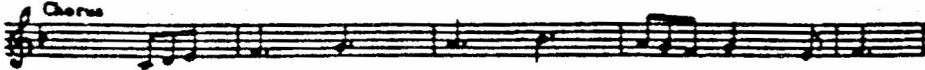
Well, it ain't be-cause I'm la - zy; no. I just don't want to be rich.



Now I could eat from dish - es, it's just a mat - ter of choice;



But when I eat from an old tin can, there ain't no dish - es to wash.



Chorus

Doo - die - dy doo doo dee doo Doo - die - dy doo dee doo.

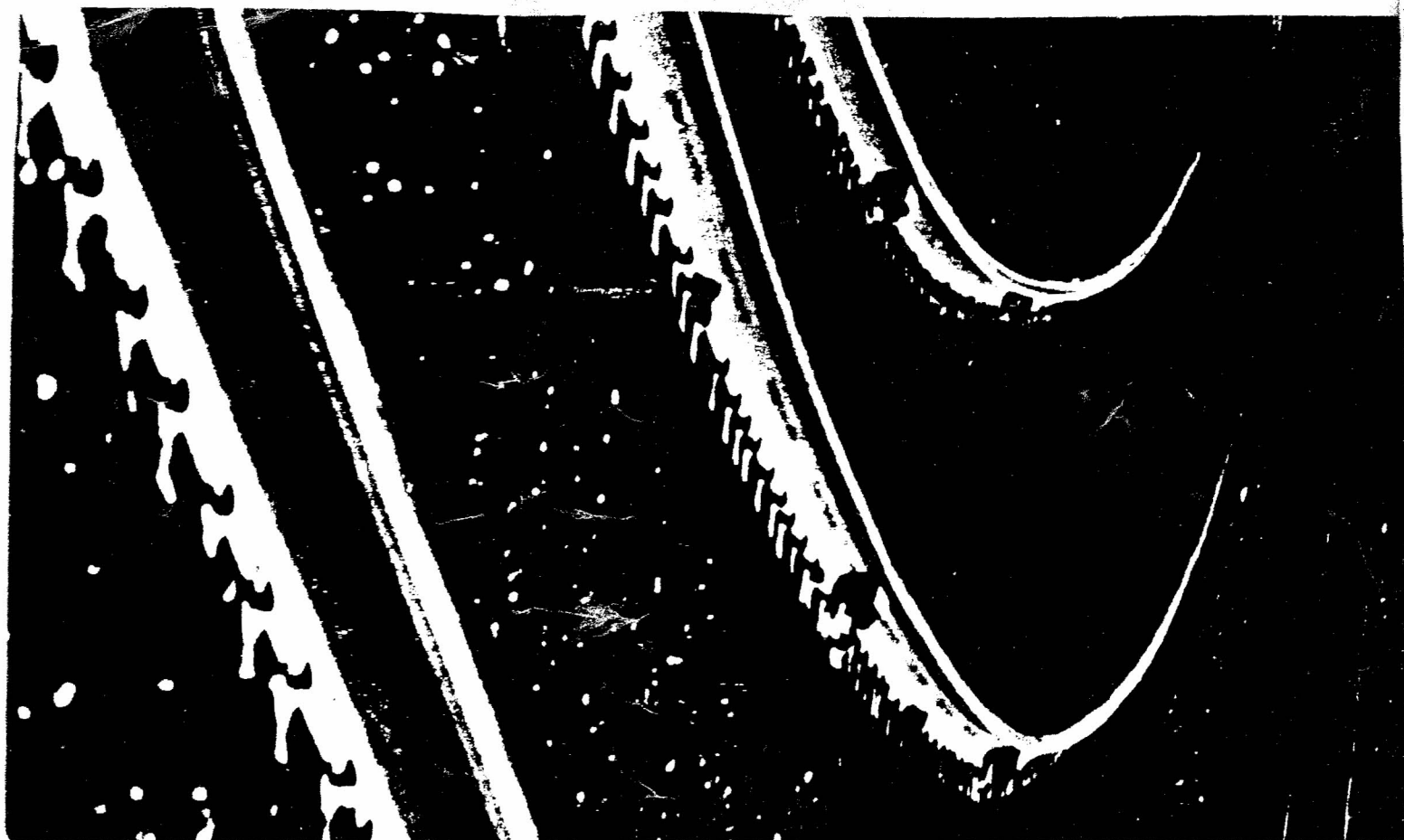
Now I could ride the pullman, but there it is again,
The plush they put on the pullman seats, it tickles my sensitive skin.
Now I could be a conductor and never have a wreck,
But any kind of a railroad man to me is a pain in the neck.

Now I could be a banker, if ever I wanted to be,
But the very thought of an iron cage is too suggestive to me.
Now I could be a broker, without the slightest excuse,
But look at 1929, and tell me what's the use.

Now I could be a doctor, my duty I never would shirk;
But if I doctored a railroad bull, he'd never go back to work.
Now you wonder why I'm a hobo, and why I sleep in the ditch.
Well, it ain't because I'm lazy; NO, I just don't want to be rich.

7-13-77

Harby



HOBOS FROM HELL

POB 2497

SANTA CRUZ

A.95063

TO: