

On the Road 2001 - There and Back Again and Things in the Middle
by aaron kreider

Prologue

Here in lies the account of my second ever hitchhiking trip. My first trip, in 1999, can be read online at <http://www.nd.edu/~akreider/essays/ontheroadzineversion.txt>.

I live in South Bend, Indiana, but this trip started off in Kansas because I was in Owen Sound, Ontario for a family reunion and then got a ride to Kansas with relatives. My goal was to make it to Alpine, WY, a small town on the Wyoming / Idaho border, a couple hours south of Yellowstone. Actually, the final destination was on a forest road twenty miles east of Alpine where Earth First! was holding its annual rendez-vous (July 7 - 16) in the Tetons National Forest.

Part I : There

I took notes on the en-route trip, which were very helpful in remembering details.

The real adventure started Sunday morning at 9am (July 8) when I got a ride with relatives from Newton (Kansas) to Salina (arrived at 10:15am), which is just on the I-70 interstate. The general plan was to hitch north on 81 to I-80, west on the interstate to Evanston, and then north on 89 to Alpine. I got a Boeing hat from my uncle, which served me well given the hot weather that was to come. I had boldly written "NORTH TO I-80" on my sign. The gods were with me and within ten minutes I had a ride, albeit a short one to Concordia. I was picked up by a woman in her thirties with a young boy and girl who were on a long trip in a van without any AC. But so long as I was making distance, that was fine.

All was going well and after thirty minutes of hitching in Concordia (or more likely its north side) I was picked up by another woman also in her thirties (with holes in her jeans) and without AC. Unfortunately she was not going far at all and left me off in Belleville around noon. The last and only other time I'd been in Kansas it was just this hot. Today the thermometer was at 95 and the heat index at 105. The fact that it was noon and there wasn't any shade where I hitched on the north side of town made matters worse. Construction work is ongoing to turn 81 into a two-lane road, but at Belleville it only had one lane going each way. I had a good spot, with a decent area for cars to pull over and they could see me for a good distance before they had to stop to pick me up, but after two hours I wasn't getting any bites. I drank most of my water (I only had 1.6 l) and then walked to the nearest gas station to refill and recover from the heat. Walking was excruciating since I wasn't accustomed to my pack and I was suffering from the heat. I got a bag of chips (figuring I was sweating out the salt) and a 32oz Slice with lots of ice. I read the local newspaper at the gas station, including an article about how 3/4 of the town was flooded in 1951. I returned to hitchhike from 3pm-4pm which is about the hottest time of the day. By this time I was sunburnt in spots since I hadn't lopped on the sun tan lotion as much as I should have. At 4pm, I called it quits as I was suffering from heat exhaustion and I headed to a travel information place-store that was the nearest place to crash. There I got some water and then crashed in the shade until 6pm. I was so exhausted that I tried lying on the grass, but it was too hot to lie down so I just sat on the bench and didn't do much. There were very few visitors to the store, mostly older people too, and as I was very tired I didn't try to get a ride.

Finally, just resting there I got a ride offer from a talkative man in his fifties whose wife worked at the store. He took me across the KS-NE border to a truck stop even though he didn't have any reason to go that way. He just wanted to help me out. Unfortunately, the truck stop was inactive since highway 81 had been re-routed away from it and it only had two trucks! So I was back to hitching on 81. Within an hour, around 7:30pm, I got a ride to York (a.k.a. I-80) from a very talkative man who was hauling materials for 81's road construction which we discussed in detail.

In York I visited the McDonald's bathroom, though I was so dehydrated that even after drinking 2-3 liters I didn't really need to go. The spot right at the on-ramp looked bad (no place to pull over), and I didn't want to risk hitchhiking on the interstate for if hitching is illegal in the area, it'd definitely be illegal on the interstate. So I hitched in front of a Flying J truck stop by a light where trucks would have to stop if it was red, with my sign saying "WEST" which is an important distinction since half of the traffic leaving the stop would be going east (and in this case more, since there were also roads going North and South).

There were many trucks. Maybe 45 per hour going west. Finally after sunset, around 9:45pm I got a long ride from a Polish trucker in his late 30s / early 40s who had been driving straight from Chicago without sleeping. He'd immigrated in 1986. He was going to California. We stopped for a short time in North Platte (still in Nebraska) where he spent a long time professionally cleaning his windshield, only for the bugs to mess it up again later. We listened to the radio and Bavarian polka music. He smoked a cigarette about every 35 miles. I got some sleep over the course of a couple hours though it was difficult since the truck wasn't air-ride equipped and it vibrated terribly. I'd lay my head on the seat rest and it could bounce up to six inches in the air. Later he gave me a pillow that helped considerably. Also I'd get blasted with cold air whenever he opened the window to smoke. We ended up for the night at a truck stop just inside Wyoming, ten miles east of Cheyenne. We'd gained over 4000 feet of altitude and were now around 5500 feet "up there". This ride made the day, since I had beforehand I'd only been getting short rides. There he told me that he'd sleep for five to six hours and encouraged me to try to find a ride in the mean time.

So I visited the bathroom and brushed my teeth (etc). As it was 4am, it wasn't a good time to get a ride so I sat in the mostly empty all-night restaurant, eating my two orders of hash browns and first cup of coffee that I'd drank this year. I took about an hour to do that and write some notes on my trip so far.

I figured that some truckers get up around the crack of dawn, so I started hitching around 5am outside the truck stop. It turns out that few of them do, and that hitching around 7am or so would be a better time but as I didn't have anywhere to sleep, I had nothing better to do than stand outside in the cold and try and hitch. It had cooled during the night, perhaps down to 60 and it was windy to boot, so I put on my rain pants over my shorts to stay warm. This was a smallish truck stop, with perhaps thirty trucks staying there overnight. For the next fourteen and half hours I hitched either by the truck stop exit or on the interstate, only taking occasional breaks. My previous driver had promised to pick me up if I hadn't found a ride, but he either didn't see me hitching or didn't want to pick me up. I suspect the prior, since I think I saw him take the back exit and miss the place where I was standing. That was terribly disappointing. I started off outside the truck stop, but after a couple hours of no luck, I was less and less reluctant to hitch on the interstate. The interstate had lots of traffic. Two lanes and around 240 vehicles per hour. It was possible for many of them to stop, as there were considerable breaks in traffic, though traffic generally piles up and comes in bunches where it is hard for all but the last vehicle in the line to pull over. Another unfortunate factor was that the speed limit was 75, at which point they have less time to see a hitchhiker and pulling over is more difficult (especially for large trucks). For this time and much of the trip, it was hard to figure out whether to hitch on the interstate where there was more traffic or at a truck stop where it was much easier for vehicles to stop.

I drank lots of water. It was probably only in the low 80s, but the sun seemed warmer with there being less atmosphere due to the altitude. I ate a pretzel, Pepsi, and tricolor popsicle from the store in the early afternoon to supplement my snacking on the food that I'd brought with me. I dumpster dived two 1-liter bottles to increase my water capacity to 3.6 liters. Unfortunately, I had these 8 pounds of water on the top of my backpack, which was not the best place for the weight.

It wasn't all hopeless, though it often seemed so, as I had a ride offer going east (it's the thought that counts) and another just to Cheyenne which I refused since travelling ten miles wouldn't help that much. As evening came, I decided to walk along the interstate up a hill to see if I could see Cheyenne in the distance or scout out a place where I could crash and get some sleep that night since I was very tired. Needless to say at this point in time I was pretty discouraged, not to mention mad at the over a thousand drivers that could have given me a ride. On my last trip, I generally got a ride in two hours, and the worst case wait was about four or five. Cheyenne was actually far beyond the hill (not to mention my limited capability to walk with my pack), but fortunately while walking I got a ride at 7:30pm. I was very surprised to get it and showed it.

And it was another woman driver! This trip I got a lot more rides from women than my last trip, when it was eight men and only one woman. She was my first strange driver of the trip. She'd been driving from Michigan, and was returning home. She was very talkative and tended to go off on tangents. Thirty-three years old, had a boy friend who was divorced and scared to marry her, had prior family and personal problems, couldn't have kids, hitch-hiked until age 22, liked country, and may have recently been "saved".

She was driving a pickup truck with a friendly cute black dog ("Bear") in the back. She worked three months per year in construction on power plants, earning over twenty thousand. We stopped in Laramie to get gas, and she also got some beer which had me a little worried as she proceeded to drink one or two of them while driving. After Cheyenne the countryside got very beautiful, though as it was night it was harder to see. For a couple hours we drove towards a very ominous looking thunderstorm, with lots of lightning, but only got a little rain. This was good since I eventually realized that my non-waterproof backpack with all my gear was in the back of the truck with Bear. Fortunately, it only got mildly wet.

I slept an hour or two in the pickup and got let out at Little America, 68 miles from the Utah border. Like Nebraska, Wyoming is a very wide state. At the end of the ride, my driver offered me some money that I refused since I didn't need any. It was a good ride as we went 300 miles and Little America was a huge truck stop. It had perhaps 100 trucks and also a lot of car traffic. At Little America, the first thing I saw was two hippies and their dog hanging out in front of store. I enthusiastically assumed/figured that they ought to be going to the EF! rendez-vous as well! Whenever I'm going to or coming from large protests I like to try and find people who are likewise involved, though I almost inevitably fail to do so. As it turned out, they weren't going to the rendez-vous, though they at least knew what EF! was and had just come back from the national Rainbow Gathering - which I think they said was in Montana. Anyways, I hit the luxurious bathroom to change clothes and put on pants for warmth. The bathroom was in excellent shape (ex. fancy faucets) and the stalls were like closets, since the walls went down to the floor and up to the ceiling. The unfortunate feature was that they had automatic flush - so it would flush about four times while I was changing clothes. Automatic flushing seems to me to be a very stupid idea.

Then I returned to the hippies. There was a young woman (20-22), "Willow", who was very hippie and a young man (23-25) who had dreadlocks (dreadlocks are more rastafarian than hippie). They had already raided the dumpster and had got some premium cookies and dried fruit. They were driving with a friend who had a car, but didn't have much of any money so they persuaded the store staff to give them some coffee for free. They filled a thermo with a mixture of tea, coffee, and hot chocolate. They half-heartedly tried to beg money from people coming in the store, so they could buy some chocolate, but failed. Kindred spirits, but like the hippies of the sixties, they were somewhat lacking in political analysis and not so much activists.

Around 2:30am we all decided to turn in. I went to the back of the truck stop and rolled out my sleeping bag on some nice grass near a small group of deer. It wasn't as cold as the previous night in Cheyenne, and with my rated "20" F (but not really) sleeping bag, I was comfortable. I got up at 7:30am, cleaned up (ex. washed hair and shaved) and hitched by the truck stop exit. This was perhaps the best hitching spot so far on the trip.

I soon met a police officer, who looked at my ID and wrote down my name. He informed me that hitching was illegal in Wyoming (which I knew), but otherwise was nice and even gave me advice on how to go to Alpine. He also said the spot I was at was probably good since it was on private property (I wonder if it is legal to hitchhike on private property, unless the truck stop people tell you to leave?). After I said that I was going to Alpine, he correctly guessed that I was going to the Earth First! rendez-vous. I guess the police know all about it. Hrm. I didn't take his directions advice since they were good for driving, but not hitching.

Within an hour I got a ride with a male trucker going to Utah who drove me the short ride into Evanston, where he stopped his truck twice blocking part of the road in-town. Other than that, he was a regular nice guy and somewhat talkative. In Evanston, he let me out at a truck stop but it looked terrible (more of a regular in-town gas station than a truck stop) so I walked around for a bit. I visited the free county museum which had lots of historical artifacts, and also an old train station where I left my name with the comment "Where is a good place to hop a freight?" Now Evanston has three interstate exits, but they all lead to highway 89 that goes north to Alpine. So I figured I'd walk to the north side of town and hitch on 89. I asked a young guy for directions to 89 and after hearing where I was going he offered me a ride! I figured this was at least one time where I was legal since I got the ride without soliciting it.

He said he'd leave in 45 minutes, so I waited around. So I ate some food, notably my soy nuts which had broken out of their bag and were now a total mess (not to mention the fact that they were very oily and got my hands all messy - note not to buy soy nuts in the future for trips and to double-bag food). 75 minutes later and after a little worrying on my part that I was being dumped again, he returned and we headed off.

He was a young guy about my age (early 20s), driving a truck with three vehicles from his dad's Evanston dealership to Afton, a town 30 miles south of Alpine. We talked a lot about the countryside, which by my standards was very scenic (though quite dry until you get further north where trees can grow). We drove past a ranch that he said was one of the ten largest in the world. He was also taking classes at a community college, and also would take people on hunts on private game fields. If you have private land you can raise animals and have an endless hunting season, in exchange for paying a tax by giving one of every ten of your permit-to-kills to the government (which sells them).

I got out in Afton and started walking on main street to get to the north side of town. I walked with my "ALPINE" sign pointed towards on-coming traffic. Within several minutes a pickup pulled-over behind me, but I didn't realize for sure that they were offering me a ride since there were already two people in the cab (and cars normally pull-over in front of you) until they pulled-over a second time. These guys were characters. An older guy (40-50) who likely served in Vietnam and was from the area, and a younger guy (late 20s) who was born and raised in Mexico (possibly of American parents). They were nice, though they got me a little worried when they started describing themselves as "outlaws" or even "mercenaries"! It was hard to tell how much of what they were saying was true, but likely they viewed themselves as outlaws in theory and had at least some run-ins with the police to back it up. Whether or not they were running from the police at the time or were guilty of significant crimes for which they had not been caught - I could not tell. At the time they were running a landscaping business with the pickup. Part of their philosophy was violent rhetoric, i.e. they said they'd kill someone who did x to me. The older guy had cut off part of someone's finger and had to pay \$10,000 fine for it. He pointed out the spot where he did it as we drove. The younger guy had hit someone with Mexico with a bottle and only paid \$50. They pointed out places like where the rough cowboys lived and another place where a guy who made the most powerful shotgun in the world lived (it could kill an elephant). The younger guy was teaming up with the older guy who was going to teach him to be an outlaw (or whatever). They talked a fair bit about guns. As outlaws, they and the others who were hiding from the law in Wyoming were not happy about all the police descending on their home ground due to the Earth First! rendez-vous. They knew all about the rendez-vous and dropped me off at the entrance to the national forest on the road that led to the gathering. They were nice, but for a while they had me worried since they were talking a little violent and there I was sitting in between the two of them in the truck cab. They didn't distinguish between political left and right which was very interesting, and almost seemed apolitical (except for their general anti-government stance). For instance they referred to both left and right as "radicals" (ex. the radicals in Michigan - i.e. the Michigan militia). Though they were clearly closer to the right, at least culturally.

At the entrance to the national forest it rained a little, though there was some cover. There wasn't much traffic, but most people would stop to see if you needed a ride. I met my first person who was going to the rendez-vous, decked out in EF! gear, he had hitched there and was now walking on foot. He decided to keep walking to the camp, even though it was twenty miles, in hopes of getting a ride on the way (and he got a ride just after I did). After being there for 45 minutes I got a ride from a woman in her thirties from Portland who was also going to her first rendez-vous. We arrived at 6pm (the day was Tuesday). I walked around a lot, took a long time to setup my tent and feed the local mosquitoes. It was very difficult to get all my gear in the solo tent (a three pound Eudora Solitaire - which is too low to sit-up in), so I stuck some of it on the side of tent partially sheltered by the rain fly. I tried to go to sleep starting around 10:30pm to the sound of "The Freddy's back and there's going to be trouble, Hey na, hey na, the Freddy's back!" and other noises of the night that kept me awake for a while. To top it off at 3am we were hit by a big thunderstorm. As I had very little camping experience, and never tested my new tent in the rain I wasn't sure if it would hold-up for the hour-long storm. But it did and only let a tiny bit of water through.

Middle Section

The next day I got up around 10:45am, and eventually headed over to the morning circle in time to catch discussion on whether or not we should file for a forest service permit.

The typical day started with a 10am morning circle where everything was discussed ranging from people stealing, to the shitter situation, to workshop announcements. The morning circle started with a group howl. From noon until 8pm, there were workshops every two hours. There was a workshop schedule that anyone could add to, but workshops were always changing location. Despite many people not using watches, things were pretty timely. Food was tricky. There was a communal kitchen ran by Seeds of Peace which served good vegan food. As some people who showed up without plates learnt, the kitchen would serve you food on cardboard - if you found some. Also some people dumpster-dived in town, scoring us many donuts and one-time about ten bags of cookies. The tricky aspect was that you never knew when meals would be served, so I often missed meals since I was in a workshop and there wouldn't be any food by the time the workshop ended. I attended workshops on BC forests, paganism and activism, Peg Millet's account of how the FBI got her for trying to cut down power lines, a music jam and sing-a-long, EF! history, and community living. After workshops, around 9pm the sunset, it became significantly colder (I wore pants, and up to three t-shirts and a sweatshirt) and people hung out at campfires.

I guess there were up to 400 people who attended at least part of the event. It was hard to say since we were generally in different spots, and people were coming and leaving. It was mostly young people in their mid-twenties, primarily hippies and punks. There were also some old-timers who'd been around for a while, as old as fifty and several children.

I had expected that I'd know at least several of the people there, but I didn't meet anyone I knew until a friend from UC Boulder SEAC showed up on Friday. It felt somewhat cliquish, as people weren't making an attempt to befriend me, I didn't know people, and I hadn't put up my tent in one of the main encampments (in fact I consistently had to stumble around every night trying to find my tent in the dark). Compared to others I looked really mainstream. I guess I should have kept my beard. Maybe a third or half of the men (the hippie-types, not the punks) had beards. I guess I'm much more used to working with people who are less radical than I. My take on the typical attendee was that they were anarchists, revolutionaries (of course), and would have no problem with monkey-wrenching or even the tactics of the ELF/ALF (notably fire). EF! has been evolving to have greater concern for non-wilderness issues and the people in attendance cared about issues like globalization. Many attendees had hitchhiked or hopped a train to get there. One person even hitched a ride on a private plane to Jackson, WY. It seemed like many people did not have full-time jobs, many of them might be doing full-time activist work or roaming around.

I especially enjoyed campfires when there was music. The two songs that I remember the most are the Anarchist Love Song (which is a blast) and Burn them Down (a song about Vail). I bought a copy of a newly published songbook whose songs I hope to learn someday soon! One night, I was sitting around a camp fire listening to people play and sing when there was some chanting coming nearer and nearer. We were being invaded by a small group of people from the "naked make-out party" who were chanting "This is what democracy looks like." In solidarity with the several naked newcomers, our performer declodded for the next song. It was the first time I'd seen someone perform naked, and it was even better since he had a talent for switching voices and was very funny. Several days later, this was topped by a naked older performer who tried to walk across the fire on a log (he slipped and fell, but recovered without being hurt). The peak of silly nakedness was a young guy who put on a short piece of "Nutcracker Theater" with Mumia and Officer Faulkner "puppets" whom he drew on his testicles. Nakedness never reached mass proportions, perhaps because it was so cold at night.

Weather was excellent. It was sunny and warm during the day, but not hot, and then cool at night. It generally rained just a little bit in the afternoon. We had a second thunderstorm in the morning of the last day I was there with some worrisome close lightning strikes.

After three days of workshops, I spent the last day hiking. I tried to hike up a mountain which was mostly burnt, however I was unable to get all the way to the top as it got too steep and it was also extremely tiring work. I did get some excellent views though. I was mildly lost on the way back, but fortunately got back to camp just as my water was running out. I was real dirty from the soot but too tired to clean-up so I just walked to where the rally was and stayed there from around 6pm until 4am. The rally was awesome. It was basically a talent show / coffeehouse style. There was music, rap, radical cheers, poetry, and a play (which I

missed). There was an official program that ended around 10pm, but the music and fun kept going past 4am. I decided to turn in at 4am, since I wanted to get some sleep as I'd decided that since people were beginning to leave before the mysterious "Action" on Monday (which nobody ever told me about what was going to happen - I guess the planning was done on Sunday), and that it'd be good to get a ride out of the place on Saturday early afternoon.

Part II : And Back Again

Since I'd stayed up late, I did not have my things in order until 2pm. I got a ride to Alpine with three people from Wisconsin. They could have given me a ride to Wisconsin, which would have been extremely nice, but since their car was tightly packed, I had to de-car in Alpine.

That afternoon it rained, hailed a bit, and when I arrived in Alpine I sat down at the gas store for perhaps almost an hour to wait out some very strong winds. After they died down, I walked south to the outskirts of town and found a low-traffic intersection where vehicles could pull-over to pick me up. After a moderate period of time, I got a ride from two young guys who were going all the way to I-80. Yeah! They had been camping and were returning home to Salt Lake City. On the way back we passed two hitchhikers who'd been at the gathering, who were stuck at an intersection with no services. The funny thing is that it's normally easier for women to get rides, however in the case of these two hitchhikers that advantage might be muted since my drivers though they were male.

Unfortunately I did not pay much attention to where we were going, and when we realized that we were going a different way than which we came, I figured we'd just missed the 13-mile highway 89 shortcut and would be shortly back on route. But instead, after finally studying the map we learnt that we were on Idaho and Utah's 89 instead of the 89 in Wyoming. While this was fine for the two guys who were going to Utah, it put me around 70 miles off-course. The advantage was that it even more scenic than the way I'd come - we often had mountains on both sides of us. The two guys were quite talkative, one had even been at Purdue and knew about and was supportive of the anti-sweatshop campaign there. I ate two of their large pretzels and a piece of red licorice. Around 7:30/8:00pm, I got off at a truck stop on the north side of Ogden.

After about an hour, around sunset, I got a ride from a quiet guy perhaps in his thirties who was just driving around without a particular destination. Anyways, he gave me a ride about 70 miles to the third and most eastern Evanston exit, which was great. I tried talking to him, but he said very little. So we mostly listened to music with the windows partially down. We stopped at one rest stop, and as an example of the trust that people put in each-other, he left his keys in the car so I could have taken off with it if I was malicious.

I tried hitch-hiking for a couple minutes at Evanston, but it was night and there was very little activity at the truck stop, so I walked under the interstate overpass a short distance to a rest/information area. I scoped it out. There were only several cars using it each hour, but the police drove by at least twice and there was a sign saying that you weren't meant to sleep there (and if drivers aren't meant to sleep, they probably don't want hitch-hikers even more). Perhaps though sleeping at rest stops is tolerated out west? I've heard some accounts where there were a considerable number of people sleeping out in the open in rest areas and it seemed not to be a problem. I rolled out my sleeping bag on the grass in the back. I slept there from midnight or so until 6am, so that I'd be up before the staff came to open the building at 8am. It was pretty cold, especially towards the morning due to the wind, so I didn't get the best night of sleep. Around 6am, I woke up to find that the sprinklers were on, and the spot I had chosen was within a couple feet of getting very wet. My sleeping bag was already quite wet since there was a lot of dew, or maybe I'd been sprinklered without noticing. I shook my sleeping bag out to dry it off, packed it up, cleaned up in the bathroom (including washing my hair), and headed off to the interstate to get a ride.

I first tried hitching in front of the on-ramp, but probably most of the traffic was local, so I wasn't getting any rides. After an hour, I switched to the interstate, and around 9am I got a ride from a middle-aged pothead in a hippie-decorated peace/love car. The car was a little beat-up, upholstery coming apart and the speedometer didn't work. He was going to Boulder to spend a couple days in jail (for drugs I assumed, but didn't ask). He smoked marijuana while driving, though seemed to drive fine. We stopped a lot. For one thing, he liked to have the gas tank 3/4 full if not more and this was aggravated by the fact that he didn't

have any money (other than \$50 left on a credit card), so to get money for gas he'd stop at gas stations or truck stops to sell bracelets which he hand-made out of four different colored pieces of string. He'd also check to see if there were any "brothers or sisters" (hitchhikers) that needed a ride since he used to hitchhike a lot until he had recently bought a car. On two occasions, I saw him raise \$5 in only a matter of 5-10 minutes. I also donated \$6.20 to gas. He also didn't like to drive fast, arguing that the roads were only built to go 55 miles, but fortunately as we didn't have a speedometer - we were going faster than that. With all of the stopping, we averaged only 50-55 miles per hour. Remember that the speed limit was 75. I was a bit upset since if I'd have got a ride with somebody driving 75-80, I'd have done the distance in an hour or likely two hours faster. He let me drive twice. First because he was likely tired of doing so, and secondly because he wanted to drink a 40 oz beer. He had strange opinions, like he was into being nice to people (the whole peace/love thing) but he also thought that most people were stupid and wrote "be smart" on his car. So he seemed pretty cynical, but lacking in any political analysis which would be necessary to understand the problems of our world. He was somewhat hard to get along with, since I didn't want to argue with his strange ideas as it didn't seem that he tolerated disagreement that well.

He left me off in Laramie at the first truck stop. There I waited an hour or so and got a ride from a Mexican-American driver of a small truck who gave me a lift to Olgallala (120 miles into Nebraska). He worked for the UP railroad. We talked a bit about hitchhiking and train hopping, but he wasn't too talkative so we listened to the radio (sports talk and a Spanish AM station from Boulder). Olgallala has a very good sized truck stop, but as I was about to hitch-hike a little past sunset I ran into two guys who were also trying to hitch-hike. They'd been there two days and were trying to get to Tennessee. This was a bit perturbing since by hitchhiker ethics, I should wait for them to get a ride before trying myself. Yet, I was likely to have a better chance since I was travelling by myself. I encouraged them to make a sign, and also suggested hitchhiking on the interstate. I guessed that much of their problem was that there were two of them, while most trucks have only two seats. They'd been going up to truckers to ask them for a ride (whereas I'm more shy and tend to use the "wave a sign" approach). I thought I'd see them again, but they disappeared. Hopefully they finally got a ride just after I showed-up. Since I wanted to sleep, I decided to walk to the rest area that was two miles away. Unfortunately it was very dark and I had to walk along the interstate so that I could find my way there. Since we had left Wyoming, the altitude was less and it was still warm at night (70?). So I walked in the grass by the interstate, getting blinded when cars approached. My flashlight batteries had given out a couple days ago, when I must have left it on all night by accident. After 30 minutes I gave up since I was being attacked by a very prickly painful plant that was getting stuck into my feet (I should have worn shoes), and also since it was somewhat dangerous and I was very hot. So I returned to the truck stop and went looking for the other two hitchhikers. They'd said that they stored their bags in a trailer that was used for Christian services for truckers, so I found the trailer with its door open but their stuff was no longer there. I sat down inside the trailer and realized that it was a good place to get some rest, so I meditated/thought/prayed for a while to see if anyone else would check on it before I crashed there. Someone came by, but left when they saw I was just meditating, and after an hour or so of no-one, I lay down on the carpeted floor and got around four hours of sleep just in my regular clothes. It got a little cold by the morning.

I got up around 6am to the sound of a voice calling my name ("Aaron!") which must have been part of a dream. I walked out of the trailer without anyone apparently noticing. I cleaned up a little and then hitched by the truck stop for a couple hours before moving to in front of the interstate on-ramp where I soon got a ride from a Chinese-American truck driver who only had one seat in his truck. The other had been removed. This was actually rather fortunate, as I could lie down on the truck's bed and despite the bumpy ride (it wasn't one of those air-ride trucks) I managed to sleep a considerable amount of the time through Nebraska and part of Iowa. He wasn't that talkative and I was too tired to make much of an effort. For lunch we stopped somewhere where he made an oriental noodles soup and gave me a little. He dropped me off at the Iowa 80 truck stop, reportedly the biggest in the US (and possibly the world) which is near the Quad Cities on the border of Iowa and Illinois. I got there a couple hours before sunrise and figured that since it was the biggest truck stop I should be able to get a ride on I-80 all the way to South Bend. I had two offers of rides to Chicago, but much to my later regret I refused them since I figured I could do better. Later I accepted a ride from a couple that had two dogs, no driver's licenses, and were driving a car that someone had recently given them that didn't have rear lights. They were travelling folk, who'd walked around the US and had a trailer in which they pulled their stuff. Unfortunately, they wanted to veer south to go to

Indianapolis, so I figured I was much better off returning and hitching at Iowa 80. So we only went a couple miles and then they drove me back. I gave them \$5 since they were short on cash.

I continued hitching at Iowa 80. I met a police officer who told me that it was illegal, but tolerated. The only main rule was that I wasn't allowed to solicit people for money (a local city rule). He was somewhat puzzled that I was hitchhiking as he was used to seeing homeless people doing it. There was a lot of traffic, though half of the trucks took another exit where they would be unlikely to stop for me. I guess that most of the car traffic was local, as I saw a lot of Iowa license plates. I didn't see a single Indiana plate on a car. So I hitched through the night, ate two bags of potato chips (99 cents each for about 90 grams), a 20 oz pepsi and 20 oz coke for caffeine, and a "super biggie" order of fries (hope they're vegetarian, they weren't from McD). Overall on this trip I probably lost several pounds as I had brought a lot of snack food (granola, dried fruit and nuts), but I wasn't eating that much. I took some break time, say around 3am, to sit down, eat and drink and read the 20th anniversary Earth First! Journal. There wasn't any good place to crash so I stayed awake the entire time. I should have been ok, since I'd slept until early afternoon the day before, but perhaps it wasn't good sleep as I was extremely tired. In the morning, I was even nodding off when I'd sit-down or even standing up trying to hitch a ride. Maybe I should have drank more caffeine? What made my failure to get a ride even worse, was that every couple hours a Greyhound bus would arrive, either going to Chicago, New York, or Los Angeles. So I knew that I could easily be on a bus and take that back home to South Bend. The first time or two that I saw a bus, I optimistically figured that I could get a ride back to South Bend faster than the bus - since Greyhounds don't drive as fast and I expected to get a direct ride from a truck so I wouldn't have to wait at the Chicago station for the South Bend bus. I took a short break from hitching when it started to rain as a storm passed through.

Eventually, around early afternoon (2-3pm) I decided that I was too tired to continue hitching. By this time, I was possibly not the most friendly-looking hitchhiker as I was getting madder and more frustrated as time passed, though I make an effort to smile at times. I think making a sign listing how long you'd been trying to get a ride might be a good idea to negate the free-rider problem, as everyone assumes that someone else will pickup the hitchhiker. So you could cross out the number of hours you've been there, or even write "Stuck Here since 3pm". During all this time at Iowa 80 I switched between using my "EAST I-80" and "SOUTH BEND" signs. At first I was using the South Bend one, but when I later decided that I'd accept a ride to Chicago I went with the EAST I-80 one. So I got tired and decided to take the bus. It wasn't a regular stop, but the driver figured out how much it would cost to go to Chicago by calling the Greyhound number (around 33\$). Since I wanted to go all the way to South Bend, he asked for a \$25 deposit and then we'd get a ticket at the next station which was Chicago.

I had two seats and slept easily on the bus. By now I could have slept on a concrete floor. In Chicago, I got my bag and waited around a bit for the bus driver. But he'd disappeared, so I looked for him in the station, but didn't find him. Rather than try to navigate the Greyhound chaotic bureaucracy and get a ticket to South Bend, I decided that I'd just go take the South Shore commuter train instead since it was more comfortable, cheaper, and likely faster. So I don't know if my driver kept the money or gave it to Greyhound. While I was in the Chicago Greyhound station (on my way out), a young guy asked me for money to help pay for his ticket which cost more than he'd been originally told. As I was pondering and somewhat doubting his story, an elderly woman came up to us and exposed him since she'd already promised to pay the extra money and here he was still asking around! Even after this, she was still willing to give him the money(!!!), but he refused and since he was caught in the act he walked away. The problem with people making up these stories is that if someone actually had a problem it would be very hard for them to get help. At least I have a very hard time telling the difference. In this case, Greyhound messing up the fare made sense since Greyhound often messes things up.

I left the bus station and walked about half an hour to the South Shore one which I found without much trouble. Took the 5:10pm train (\$9) to the South Bend airport (note hitching would have been better since the interstate is only a mile from my home), then caught the bus (75 cents) and transferred downtown to take me home. I arrived home around 8:30pm. So the return trip took three days and six hours.

Miles - On the Way There

140 - from I-70 to I-80
350 - Nebraska, west on I-80
400 - Wyoming, west on I-80
160 - north to Alpine
20 - from Alpine to campsite
→ 1070 miles
(2.33 days of hitching - 459 miles/day)

Miles - On the Way Back
200 - from Alpine to Ogden
70 - Ogden to Evanston
400 - Wyoming, east on I-80
450 - Nebraska, east on I-80
280 - to Iowa 80 truck stop, east on I-80
→ 1400 miles
(3 days of hitching - 467 miles/day)

So I hitched for a total of 2470 miles. On average I traveled 460 miles per day which was about the same as my first trip (where I averaged 500 miles/day), though this time I got significantly less sleep since I didn't get to sleep in trucks. I also got really stuck twice. In comparison to these two times, spending the night in North Dakota stuck in the Theodore Roosevelt National Park (on my first trip) was nothing.

Apparently hitching is far easier in Europe. A lot of American truck drivers would be willing to pick you up, but companies have rules against it stemming from insurance reasons. So they're taking a significant risk, unless perhaps they own their truck.

Overall I probably won't go on a long hitchhiking trip for a while. I think shorter trips are fine, say one or two days where you can go without sleep. But longer ones are draining. Being homeless isn't that fun, and if you're going to pay \$35 for a motel you might as well save money by taking and sleeping on Greyhound. You definitely do meet fascinating people and it is the most adventurous way I know to travel, but you know that, for instance, when you start composing new verses to "The Bear Went Over the Mountain", singing "500 bottles of soy milk on the wall" or decide to hitch-hike standing on one foot - that there are more exciting things to do than stand by the side of the road for ten hours. That's not to say that everyone shouldn't try it at least once, especially males for whom it's less risky. Hitchhiking is an ideal. I believe that people are good and by hitchhiking hope to learn to trust and like people whom I'd never ever meet. I don't think it should be too impossible to make hitching an effective form of transportation. Everyone used to do it. My dad even hitched to his wedding. Ideally hitchhiking is part, albeit a rather small part, of my radical commitment to build a just society.

Appendix

And here's a song spoof I rewrote two verses for that goes as follows:

This land's not your land, this land's not my land
From Silicon Valley to Wall Street
From the corporate towers, to the factory farms
This land's not made for you and me

(need to add some verses here)

I was walkin' - I saw a sign there
And that sign said - no tress passin'
But on the other side, I saw ten thousand people
Shutting down the IMF and World Bank meeting in DC!

This land is your land, this land is my land
From California, to the New York Island

From the redwood forest, to the gulf stream waters
This land was made for you and me