

## The Rides and the Drivers.

In life, travel is not just about the places you go and the sights you see. It is about the people you meet. That was the lure of hitchhiking in the 1970s — brief encounters with people from all walks of life.

I got picked up by the rich, the poor, the educated, the blue collar, the white collar, and those with no collar at all who slipped through life anyway they could. Thousands of people picked me up through the years. Among them are a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, the Marlboro man, the Swedish Secretary of Agriculture, soldiers in Bulgaria, drunks and drug addicts, and countless people with jobs you never knew existed. Add to that, you had members of every religious flavor in the world handing you Bibles and literature and offering you salvation. Most of these drivers just needed someone to talk to for a few miles, but they would go above and beyond to help you out.

If it rolled, they'd pull over and wave you in. I caught free rides in just about everything that moved — not only cars, but buses, taxis, farm tractors, mopeds, motorcycles, ambulances, police cars (not always at a moment of my choosing), semis, tow trucks, limousines, and an empty hearse. Once, I even snagged the passenger seat of a two-seater Cessna that dropped me into a field on a homesteaded farm in Northern Canada.

The only type of vehicle that never stopped for me was the large, expensive RVs like Winnebago and Airstreams. And I understood why. The safety for the families they carried, and the fear for the wealth they had.

In my backpacking days, I was asked for money only twice. The first was a VW van headed to the Rainbow Gathering in Taos, New Mexico, scooping up every backpacker in sight and asking for a few bucks toward gas just to keep the car moving. The second time was from an embarrassed banker in Norway who'd come up a little short on fuel and money and asked if I could spot him a few dollars to finish the 300-mile ride he gave me across the country.

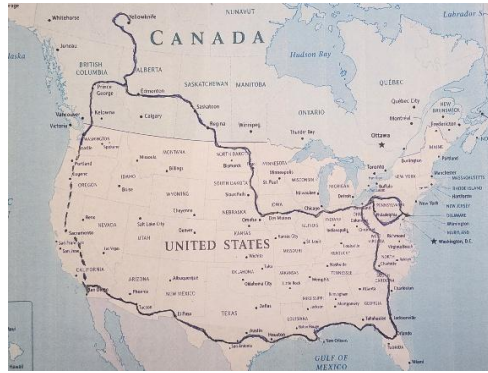
At times, people offered me money, food, alcohol, drugs, or a place to stay. I never asked for a thing. But if someone pressed a few bills into my hand, I never turned them down.

My first attempt at hitchhiking was in 1968, when I was in the Navy, hoping to get from San Diego to Las Vegas while on leave. I was trying to overcome my childhood shyness. Once you climb into a stranger's car, there's no hiding. You talk. You listen. You learn.

The education is astonishing. From the dentist who pulls over, you pick up a bit of dentistry. From the disc jockey, a taste of music. The lobsterman hands you the sea, and the astronomer lifts your eyes to the stars. The road becomes an endless classroom, each ride another lesson you never expected.

Eventually, the road wins. The hitchhiking, the stories, and the wild variety of people become more important than the destination itself.

**THESE 143 PEOPLE CARRIED ME 11,050 MILES ACROSS NORTH AMERICA IN THE SUMMER OF 1981**



## RIDE FROM/TO

## MILES

## DRIVER

### Washington State

Renton → Redmond:	26 miles	Lady running away from home
Redmond to Bothell	19 miles	Girlfriend
Bothell → Everett:	15 miles	Woodsman
Everett → Marysville:	7 miles	Ceramic Salesman
Marysville → South Bellingham:	55 miles	Boat Sander
South Bellingham → Bellingham:	5 miles	Auto Body Repairman
Bellingham → South Lynden:	12 miles	Mobile Home Salesman
South Lynden → Lynden:	3 miles	Motorcyclist
Lynden → Lynden:	2 miles	Youth in pickup
Lynden → Sumas (border):	8 miles	Factory Rep Plumbing

### British Columbia

Sumas → Chilliwack:	22 miles	New Construction Broker
Chilliwack → Agassiz:	10 miles	Girl Forestry Student
Agassiz → Hope:	22 miles	Mobile Home Builder
Hope → 100 Mile House:	200 miles	Tugboat Sailor
100 Mile House → Lac La Hache:	9 miles	Railroad Track Layer
Lac La Hache → South Prince George:	140 miles	Bush Pilot
South Prince George → Prince George:	5 miles	Young House Builder
Prince George → North Prince George:	5 miles	Student
North Prince George → Bear Lake:	45 miles	Government Official
Bear Lake → Mackenzie Junction:	25 miles	Sawmill Manager

Mackenzie Junction → Chetwynd:	90 miles	Tractor Salesman
Chetwynd → Dawson Creek:	60 miles	Railroad Worker
Dawson Creek → Grande Prairie (AB):	80 miles	Disc Jockey

## Alberta

Grande Prairie → Woking	25 miles	A Friend
Woking → Rycroft	15 miles	Two Drunken Kids
Rycroft → Fairview	60 miles	High School Student
Fairview → Bluesky	13 miles	Bartender
Bluesky → Brownvale	10 miles	6 Drunk Native Canadians
Brownvale → Grimshaw	12 miles	Young Kid
Grimshaw → Dixonville	27 miles	Farmer
Dixonville → Manning	42 miles	Bridge Builder
Manning → “20 Miles”	20 miles	Farmer and Wife
“20 Miles” → Hawk Hills	40 miles	Vacationers
Hawk Hills → Hay River	110 miles	Caterpillar Rep

## Northwest Territories

Hay River → “15 Miles”	15 miles	Landscaper
“15 Miles” → Enterprise	33 miles	Highway Superintendent
Enterprise → Mackenzie River ferry	55 miles	Government Worker
Mackenzie River ferry → Yellowknife	201 miles	Trucker
Yellowknife → Enterprise:	300 miles	Two Contractors
Enterprise → High Level:	120 miles	Teacher/Bricklayer
High Level → Whitecourt:	330 miles	Meatpacker
Whitecourt → Cottonwood:	20 miles	Power Line worker
Cottonwood → Mayerthorpe:	12 miles	Dump Truck
Mayerthorpe → Edmonton:	75 miles	Young Man with Narcolepsy
Edmonton → Innisfree:	85 miles	Road Equipment Operator
Innisfree → Mannville:	10 miles	Minister
Mannville → Vermilion:	12 miles	Turkey Stuffer
Vermilion → Saskatoon:	230 miles	Two Plasterers

## Saskatchewan

Saskatoon → Dundurn:	25 miles	Old Polish Immigrant
Dundurn → Regina:	135 miles	Doctorate of English
Regina → Weyburn:	70 miles	Greenhouse Owner
Weyburn → Portal (border):	60 miles	Auto Parts Rep

### **North Dakota**

Portal → Drayton, ND:	150 miles	Young Trucker
Drayton → Grand Forks:	40 miles	81-year-old Ukulele Player
Grand Forks → Fargo:	80 miles	Cattle Hauler
Fargo, ND → Horace, ND	8 miles	Farmer

### **South Dakota**

Horace → Sisseton, SD	60 miles	Junk Man
Sisseton → Peever, SD	8 miles	Young Indian
Peever → Watertown, SD	45 miles	Son of Junk Man
Watertown → Clearwater, SD	78 miles	Student
Clearwater → Tea, SD	66 miles	Electronic Salesman

### **Iowa**

Tea → Council Bluffs, IA	190 miles	Unemployed Vietnam Vet
Council Bluffs → Des Moines, IA	135 miles	County Executive
Des Moines → Rock Falls, IL	240 miles	Black Trucker

### **Illinois**

Rock Falls → Newark, IL	70 miles	Chrysler Dealer
Newark → Lisbon	10 miles	Garbage Man
Lisbon → Joliet	20 miles	Geophysicist
Joliet → Chicago Heights	25 miles	Joliet Prison Guard
Chicago Heights → Markham	10 miles	Illinois State Patrol
Markham → Cleveland, OH	345 miles	Gay Graphics Man

### **Ohio**

Cleveland → Painesville	30 miles	EPA Employee
Painesville → Conneaut	40 miles	Woman Candy Wholesale
Conneaut → Conneaut	6 miles	Young Boy
Conneaut → Erie	30 miles	Three Machinists

### **Pennsylvania**

Erie → Erie	8	Retired Whiskey Salesman
Erie → Erie	6	Cemetery Plot Salesman
Erie → Franklin, PA	70 miles	Furniture Salesman
Franklin → Barkeyville	17 miles	Garbage Truck
Barkeyville → Emlenton	12 miles	Disabled Lady
Emlenton → Bethlehem	260 miles	Bricklayer
Bethlehem → Quakertown	20 miles	Vacuum Salesman
Quakertown → Tauber	15 miles	Warehouse Shipper
Tauber → Molly Hills	20 miles	Medical Technician

### **New Jersey**

Molly Hills → Hammonton	25 miles	Produce Trucker
Hammonton → Atlantic City	35 miles	Bartender
Atlantic City → Pittsburgh	360 miles	Auctioneer

### **Pennsylvania**

Pittsburgh, PA → Cairnbrook, PA	85 miles	Machinist
Cairnbrook → Evans Town	110 miles	Air Freight Driver
Evans City → Erie, PA	105 miles	Radio Program Director
Erie → Cleveland, OH	100 miles	Architect

### **Ohio**

Cleveland → Medina, OH	35 miles	Beauty Product Salesman
Medina → Mansfield, OH	50 miles	Steelworker and Family
Mansfield → Mt Vernon, OH	35 miles	Unemployed Youth
Mt Vernon → Newark, OH	20 miles	Contractor
Newark → Granville, OH	6 miles	Marine Sergeant
Granville → 15 Miles	39 miles	Bread Truck
15 Miles → Lancaster	23 miles	Aluminum Worker
Lancaster → Logan	15 miles	Back of Roofer's Pickup
Logan → Athens	32 miles	Urban Planner
Athens → Coolville	20 miles	Machinist
Coolville → Parkersburg, WV	12 miles	Insulation Installer

### **West Virginia**

Parkersburg, WV → Beckley, WV	115 miles	Steel Fabricator
-------------------------------	-----------	------------------

Beckley → Waynesville, NC	210 miles	Power Linesman
<b>North Carolina</b>		
Waynesville → Hendersonville, NC	25 miles	Trucker
Hendersonville → Inman, SC	30 miles	Photographer
<b>South Carolina</b>		
Inman → Spartanburg, SC	10 miles	Peach Pickers
Spartanburg → Cross Anchor, SC	20 miles	Computer Assembler
Cross Anchor → Enoree, SC	10 miles	Swimming Pool Builder
Enoree → Laurens, SC	12 miles	Three Youths
Laurens → Columbia, SC	70 miles	Student/Janitor
Columbia → Columbia	7 miles	Doctor
<b>Florida</b>		
Columbia → Orlando, FL:	340 miles	US Navy Musician
Orlando → Lake Arthur, FL	55	Drug Dealer
Lake Arthur → Auburndale	25	Aluminum Sider
Auburndale → Lakeland	10	Sheet Metal Worker
Lakeland → Plant City	15	Welder
Plant City → Plant City	7	Reborn Christian
Plant City → Plant City	6	Woman Secretary
Plant City → Tampa	25	Crypto Expert
Tampa → Tampa	11	Accountant
Tampa → Tampa	6	Friend
Tampa → Ocala	85	Transformer Builder
Ocala → Lake City	50	Okies
<b>Louisiana</b>		
Lake City → New Orleans, LA	430	Gambler/Roustabout
<b>Texas</b>		
New Orleans → Winnie, TX	210	Sobering Drunk
Winnie → 10 Miles	10	City Light Worker
“10 Miles” → Galveston	45	Junk Man
Galveston → Houston	50	Draftsman
Houston → Katy	30	GE Worker

Katy → Columbus, TX	70	Student
Columbus, TX → San Antonio	120	Computer Mover
San Antonio → Junction	115	Oil Seismic Tester
Junction → Sheffield	115	Three Drunk Hippies
<b>Arizona</b>		
Sheffield → Tucson, AZ	650	Retired Banker
<b>California</b>		
Tucson → Anaheim, CA	480	Hughes Research Employee
Anaheim → Santa Ana	10	Carpet Layer
Santa Ana → San Diego	90	Hairdresser
San Diego → Laguna Beach	55	Literary Agent
Laguna Beach → Costa Mesa	15	Teenagers in Pickup
Costa Mesa → Los Angeles	40	Medical Worker
Los Angeles → Seattle	1136	Greyhound Bus