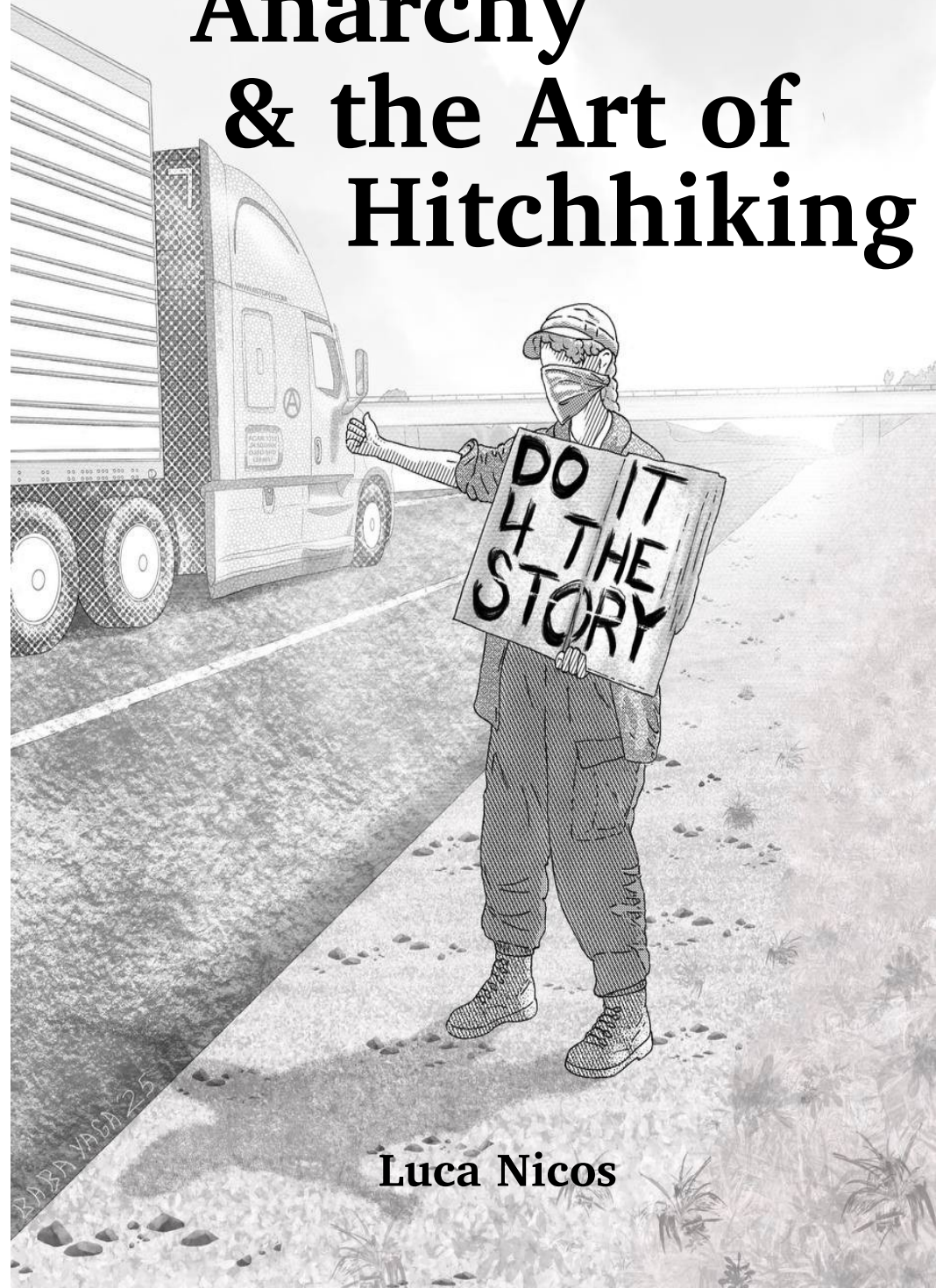


Nomadic people have historically posed the greatest threats to and have been the most maligned by State powers. Pirates, Barbarians, Romani, and Bedouins, amongst other transient groups, have historically been in conflict with civilizing forces and systems of power due to their illegibility and the extent to which these populations are difficult to control. Hitchhiking is not only fun, but is also a strategy for evading the confines of State power and the repression that is an intrinsic component of forced sedentization. When I learned about hitchhiking, a world of possibilities opened up to me. Learning about and embracing this modality helped me see that none of the paths set out for us that dictate how we are supposed to navigate the world are inevitabilities. I could turn life into a choose-your-own-adventure story or RPG instead of being deeply depressed due to being confined to the normative trajectories that were imposed on me. In the traveling world, if riding freight trains is a science then hitchhiking can be considered an art. Riding trains requires a lot of precision and careful calculations, while hitchhiking is deeply complex, interrelational, and unpredictable. There is also no objectively good or bad way of going about it. As is the case with art hitchhiking is largely about personal style and preference.

Warzone Distro
WARZONEDISTRO.NOBLOGS.ORG
2025

Anarchy & the Art of Hitchhiking



Luca Nicos

Why I Love Hitchhiking

Nomadic people have historically posed the greatest threats to and have been the most maligned by State powers. Pirates, Barbarians, Romani, and Bedouins, amongst other transient groups, have historically been in conflict with civilizing forces and systems of power due to their illegibility and the extent to which these populations are difficult to control. Hitchhiking is not only fun, but is also a strategy for evading the confines of State power and the repression that is an intrinsic component of forced sedentization. When I learned about hitchhiking, a world of possibilities opened up to me. Learning about and embracing this modality helped me see that none of the paths set out for us that dictate how we are supposed to navigate the world are inevitabilities. I could turn life into a choose-your-own-adventure story or RPG instead of being deeply depressed due to being confined to the normative trajectories that were imposed on me. In the traveling world, if riding freight trains is a science then hitchhiking can be considered an art. Riding trains requires a lot of precision and careful calculations, while hitchhiking is deeply complex, interrelational, and unpredictable. There is also no objectively good or bad way of going about it. As is the case with art hitchhiking is largely about personal style and preference.

People typically seem to fear for my life when they see me out hitchhiking on the road because they feel that my morphology and appearance put me at great risk. I choose to hitchhike regardless out of a refusal to play the role of victim, a commitment to defending myself, and out of a sense of defiance against the idea that I should let fear dictate how I move in the world. As it turns out, the vast majority of people willing to take the risk of picking up a hitchhiker are amongst the kindest people I've ever met. They're almost always people who are willing to take a personal risk for a stranger. They're people I would otherwise never have interacted with, and I get to learn so much from the people who choose to give me rides. Traveling in this way has taught me so much more than any class ever could. Hitchhiking has also had some

mundane, civilized daily flow. Some employees at Staples helped me rescue a baby bird who had fallen from their nest earlier. Someone approached me excited to see some travelers in their town and wanted to know how they could see images from or hear stories of my travels. They turned to their partner and said, "See, I told you these kinds of people are the nicest people ever!" A number of people approached us throughout the day asking if we wanted water on a hot day. The downside of traveling in this way might be that it has made living a more normative life feel completely impossible. When I've tried living in a house or an apartment I now feel unbearably confined, isolated, and depressed. Each day on the road is a puzzle of survival and I never know where or when my next meal will be or where I'll be sleeping, which I find really exciting and invigorating. I'm sure this life isn't for everyone, but for those of us who feel severely alienated by the stifling realities we did not choose to live in, it can help us feel so much more alive.

Front cover artwork by Baba Yaga

trees on the grounds. If it's going to rain the modular sheds outside of places like Lowe's or Home Depot can be a great option. During warmer months those sheds can get pretty hot and stuffy but in colder months they can make an excellent option that will help keep you warm and dry.

To Wrap Things Up

Hitching, living out of a backpack, and sleeping outside every night is a tough life in many ways and can be exhausting. Getting kicked out of places rudely by security for simply sitting and existing can be really jarring. Having cops called because the dogs got startled and barked or because someone was uncomfortable with the presence of a vagrant can feel really demoralizing. Needing to walk miles in the pouring rain with a heavy pack on or being stuck in the blazing heat with limited options for shade can really, really suck. Even so, I have never been happier than when I've lived in this way. I love feeling like I've pushed myself hard all day and getting truly satisfying rest at night. Even when things get difficult at least they feel real.

As I write this, I'm sitting outside of a Walmart in Sandusky, Ohio, charging my electronics while hanging out with my road dog, his two dogs, and my three pups. I've been reminded multiple times tonight why I love this life so much. For one thing, it's the only modality I've existed in that makes me fully able to relax and enjoy life. It makes me more aware of my surroundings, and it gives me countless opportunities to connect with strangers in fleeting but meaningful ways. It's given me more optimism regarding humanity than any other capacity in which I've lived. Sure, most people try to ignore the people who are visibly living out of backpacks, but there are so many who are excited to talk and connect. Just getting smiles back from the people I wave to brightens my day. It feels like a way of puncturing the imposed isolation and disconnection of civilization. You start to realize that so many people are on autopilot each day and don't even really notice each other. When you live in such a conspicuous and abnormal way you invite a sort of rupture in the

unexpected but profound positive effects in my life, such as quashing an intense and enduring desire to restrict food and lose weight.

The eating disorder recovery world often claims that these diagnoses are about control rather than about aesthetics. I long thought that something was off about this control narrative, and I had a big problem with the ways in which treatment seemed to focus on desensitizing people to the reality of not having any control over their own lives. Most of those programs seem to be about obedience to authority rather than cultivating body liberation or joy. It was not control that I craved, it was self-determination. No amount of body positivity, self-love, or therapy alleviated the obsessions that consumed me. Instead, the first time in my life that I did not feel a perpetual sense of stress and hypervigilance relating to my body was when I started hitchhiking. Living nomadically and in a way that radically deviates from prescribed social scripts allowed me to let go and feel truly free. Learning how to transcend societal rules and actively breaking the fourth wall of civilization helped me work the mental muscle that would allow me to break my own rules as well. Hitchhiking and living out of a backpack opened doors that led to completely transformative possibilities. Hitchhiking evokes a sense of rupture in relation to normative models of interpersonal dynamics. It allows for fleeting connections that often inspire a greater sense of authenticity and openness due to the perception that it will be a fleeting (but somehow inherently intimate) interaction. The following text is a brief guide to finding anarchic forms of freedom and connection through hitchhiking.

Risks

There are always risks when it comes to getting into a vehicle. Car accidents happen all the time and a lot of people are really shitty drivers. It is absolutely not worth staying in a situation that starts to feel dangerous or scary. If you get a bad feeling from someone, you can look at your phone suddenly and tell them that someone else, perhaps a

friend, came through with a ride. If you get into someone's vehicle and start to feel uncomfortable it is always okay to tell them that the nearest exit will work well for you or that you just got a text from someone you met earlier who can pick you up and take you closer to your destination. It is absolutely not worth it to put yourself in a dangerous or scary situation. Lying should absolutely be acceptable (if not encouraged) when it comes to matters of safety. If you have dogs with you, you should absolutely trust their judgment if they don't want to get into a vehicle with someone. Dogs are often better judges of character than members of our own species.

If you are scared that something bad might happen to you, take a photo of the license plate of the person who is giving you a ride and send it to someone you trust. If you do this I would suggest asking the driver first if they are alright with you doing so for your own safety, and if they refuse to let you take this measure or if it makes them uncomfortable, it might be a bad idea to ride with them.

Other risks include getting stuck in places where you lack access to supplies, needing to find somewhere safe to be during awful weather, getting kicked out of places that are not friendly to hitchhikers or homeless people, or being discovered at your sleep spot. All of these risks are scenarios for which it is important to stay prepared. Make sure to restock whenever you can if provisions get low, look at a map when you're heading into an area to determine what places you might be able to take cover, cultivate the art of talking to store owners or store management, and scout carefully for a private and safe sleep spot every night.

Selecting Spots to Hitch From

It's generally beneficial to position yourself on the far side of a town in the direction you're headed. Try to pick a spot with lots of traffic on the same side of the road that you're headed. Across the US, major truck stops such as Love's, Pilot/Flying J, and Petro are all advantageous hitch spots. In the Northeast I've found that Sheetz tends to be a good place to hitch from while in the Rocky Mountain states, Mavericks are often a good option. Even so, I've found I get much more frequent (but shorter) rides walking along state roads whether or not I have a thumb out. It can be pretty difficult (but certainly not impossible) to get rides out of major cities, so I try to stick to smaller towns or the outskirts of cities. hitchwiki.org is a great resource not only for finding out the legalities of hitchhiking in different places but also for learning about other people's experiences with ease of travel in different places.

Finding Good Sleep Spots

For one night you're likely to get away with sleeping in most places, but this doesn't always hold true. Google Maps is a great tool when finding sleep spots. Look for large patches of trees close to your location and try to pick somewhere as inconspicuous or invisible as possible. Ticks and mosquitoes are very common (and somewhat annoying) critters to encounter in many more eastern areas. If you think you'll likely be spending the night in a given spot it is a good idea to walk around and scout for somewhere to sleep before it gets dark. On weekends or during the Summer you can usually get away with sleeping on school grounds. Banks and even the post office can be a safe choice on Saturday evenings. Walmarts are very often surrounded by a lot of wooded land and can be great places to sleep. If you're sleeping anywhere that might be at all visible or audible to a business check the business hours before selecting that spot. Cemeteries are very often a great, quiet place to spend the night, especially if there are patches of

When it comes to getting a ride, make sure that you're positioned in a way that makes it easy for someone to pull over. You can sit visibly at a truck stop or gas station, with or without a cardboard sign, stand on a ramp with a wide shoulder in the direction you're heading, or walk along the shoulder of a state road. If you are trying to hitch out of a truck stop or gas station (or sometimes another store along your route), try to pick somewhere with as much traffic as possible. Get a feel for how the employees feel about you being there and use that to help you determine how conspicuous you want to be. If they seem unhappy that you are there try to stay on the periphery and make eye contact with or smile and possibly wave at people who come by. Sometimes it can be helpful to ask the store employees if it's okay for you to fly a sign. They will likely appreciate that you are being considerate and respectful and it can reduce the chance that you'll get kicked out of a spot.

It is illegal to walk along the side of the Interstate in the US in most states, and when it comes to state highways you should check the local laws about the legality of walking on the side of the road. Be careful about putting a thumb out because, in many places (around the US at least), hitchhiking is illegal. If you get stopped by the cops, as long as you don't have a thumb out, you were simply walking and not breaking the law. When walking along smaller, local roads, try to be careful to walk ones that aren't too winding and that have a wider shoulder. Be especially careful about this if you have dogs with you.

Dealing with the Cops

Odds are at some point you'll have to deal with security or the cops. Sometimes for hitchhiking and sometimes just for sitting somewhere and minding your own business. It is really important to know the laws in the places that you're traveling. Get as well-versed as possible in knowing your rights. A lot of cops are just bullies who don't actually know the laws they're supposedly upholding.

Building a Pack

When you're traveling in this capacity, your pack is your house, so it's critical to make sure that you prepare it strategically so that you have everything you might need but don't get overloaded. I would recommend getting a pack that is at least 55L, but 65-80L would be on the safer side as far as ensuring you have enough space for what you might need for an uncertain length of time. What you take with you will likely vary depending on the season and on where you'll be heading, but it's important to have a good idea of what you should be sure to have. The following are some key items to carry in your pack or on your person:

- **Headlamp:** Headlamps are essential for finding sleep spots and navigating after dark. I like to keep one headlamp around my neck and one spare headlamp in my pack just in case. I tend to prefer rechargeable headlamps, but there are also some good battery-powered ones. If you get a battery-powered headlamp be sure to carry extra batteries with you.
- **Knife:** Knives are an incredibly useful and versatile tool. Keep your knife handy and on your person so that you don't have to search through your pack to find it. I typically wear a knife around my neck almost as a necklace since I want to be transparent with the people giving me a ride that I do have ways to defend myself if needed.
- **Sleeping Pad or Yoga Mat.** A sleeping pad will make a huge difference to how well you're able to sleep! I'm not a huge fan of the inflatable ones because usually by the time I'm going to sleep I don't want to bother with blowing up a sleeping pad. I also usually travel with dogs who could easily puncture an inflatable sleeping pad. And in general I find the simple, cheap, accordion sleeping pads to be more comfortable than the inflatable ones. A yoga mat is a decent alternative since, although it doesn't have as much cushioning, it is somewhat more versatile (especially if

you're someone who enjoys doing yoga).

- **Sleeping Bag:** take a look at the weather in the places you will be traveling. Get a sleeping bag that will prepare you for the coldest possible temperatures based on the times and places in which you will be traveling.
- **Tarp:** A tarp can in some cases take the place of a tent. If you do have a tent a tarp is still a great addition to your pack and is a bit like a knife in terms of its versatility and necessity. I generally find tents too heavy and clunky to carry with me when I hitch, but they are good for keeping out the bugs and rain, and whether or not to carry a tent is largely a matter of personal preference.
- **Paracord:** this can be useful for securing your tarp to trees for a makeshift tent or, if you're traveling with dogs, for securing them at night.
- **Water:** I like to carry at least one gallon of water with me in a water jug as well as a decent-sized water bottle. This is an absolute minimum for me since I travel with 3 dogs. Having sufficient water is especially essential when traveling in arid/desert climates. I also like to have some electrolyte drink mixes on hand to make sure I'm able to stay hydrated. Try to make sure your jug is sturdy. A lot of people prefer to use the Arizona Iced Tea jugs because the plastic they are made of is very thick. If possible, a metal gallon jug/thermos is the best, sturdiest option and will help keep your cold water chilled for far longer.
- **Power banks, cords, and wall chargers:** I like to have at least 2 power banks on hand, especially since I don't know where and when I will be able to charge my electronics.
- **Toiletry bag:** This should include hygiene items, a toothbrush, toothpaste, any medications you need, and wet wipes.
- **Trowel:** You never know when you might need to take a shit outside.

possible, and even if you feel like you have enough water, if a stranger offers you some try to take it unless it would mean that you have more than you can physically carry. Lots of walking and moving and spending most of your time outside means everyone's water needs will increase, so staying hydrated should be a top priority. Make sure to find spots each day where they can run around and play off leash. Some Love's Truck Stops have mini dog parks, which can be a good option. You need to be careful with how visible you are at Love's though because they have adopted a policy that says you can only spend time there if you have a vehicle with you. If the staff are lenient, however, they may not care about enforcing the policy.

Safety and Other Practical Tips: Do's, Dont's, and Different Methods of Hitchhiking

It'll take time to figure out your personal traveling style and what works well for you on the road, but I'll also share some of the insights I've picked up over the years as well. One of the biggest "Do's" for me is simply: give back. I like to carry prints of my artwork, especially in postcard form, to hand out to people who give me rides. I don't believe that a hitchhiker owes anything to the person who gives them a ride, but the person offering a ride also doesn't owe that ride to the hitchhiker. Giving back is just a nice thing to do, and it helps make that interaction a positive and memorable one for the person you're riding with. Try to be conscientious of their comfort, boundaries, and feelings of safety. Take time to listen to the person giving you a ride and ask questions to engage them in conversation. You never know what you might learn! However, be careful not to get interrogative or nosy. When you ask questions, let them know that there is no pressure for them to speak about anything they don't feel comfortable talking about. Make it known that you appreciate the risk this person is taking by picking up a total stranger.

seem to be more likely to pick up individuals who they perceive to be part of their own demographic. Hitchhiking is a situation for which being more feminine can be advantageous since people are likely to be concerned for your safety and consider you to be less of a threat. When adding people to your crew be mindful of the size of people's vehicles and the options you may have for rides as a result.

A lot of people travel with dogs, and there are a lot of advantages to doing so. Dogs can be an icebreaker and someone with a dog who looks happy and well-cared for is likely to be perceived as more trustworthy by potential rides. Make sure to only travel with dogs who actually enjoy traveling in this way! It's messed up to force someone to do something they don't enjoy doing. It can be helpful to have dogs at a sleep spot to alert you to any threats that might be around, but also be aware that loud dogs can alert people nearby to where you are sleeping and get you kicked out of your sleep spot.

Dog Care on the Road

Make sure to have a solid plan as to how you will feed and care for the dogs in your party on the road. I have hitched with anywhere from one to three dogs. Keeping up with their food, water, and activity needs requires constant vigilance and creativity. It can be advantageous to ask people working at any fast food joints or gas stations nearby if they happen to be throwing out anything that could be given to the pups instead. People who see you may offer to buy you dog food or may have dog food on hand that they will offer you. Try to be clear about what the pups can or cannot eat if anyone expresses an interest in helping feed them. Another helpful strategy for feeding dogs on the road is by "being a hotel guest" somewhere that has free hot breakfasts.

Give the dogs in your traveling crew as many opportunities as possible to drink water! Try to fill up your water supply as frequently as

- **Butt wipes:** See the above item.
- **ID/cards/money:** Keep these easily accessible. I like to either keep them in secure pants or jacket pockets, or in a waist bag.
- **Carabiners:** Carabiners are crucial for holding onto any satellite items that you need easy access to or that won't fit inside of your pack.
- **Clothing:** This will vary depending on what season it is. You're always going to want to have at least one additional shirt and pants to change into, some form of rain gear, a hoodie, at least 3 pairs of underwear, and a decent supply (4 or 5) pairs of socks (you will run through them pretty quickly). During warmer months you can swap out one of the pairs of pants for shorts and during colder periods you should have underlayers, a long-sleeved shirt, and a warm winter coat. Sometimes it's good to have a warm winter jacket even during the summer in case there are unseasonably cold nights or if you're heading to areas with colder year-round climates.
- **Bandana:** Travelers often wear a bandana around their neck because they're great for wiping up all of the sweat, dirt, and snot that inevitably winds up on our faces.
- **Spoon/spork:** sometimes all it takes is one utensil to make sure you're able to feed yourself on the road.

Optional/Circumstantial:

- **Sleeping bag liners:** if you know you'll be somewhere that gets pretty cold, even hardy winter sleeping bags might not be enough! A sleeping bag liner can make you way more comfortable at night. Alternatively, during the summer a sleeping bag liner can take the place of a sleeping bag and lighten your load if you're exclusively going to be traveling in places that will be warm at night.
- **Water filter:** If you're going to be spending significant periods in

the wilderness, being able to filter water will be important for survival. If you're sticking to the highways then this will likely not be necessary.

- **Mosquito netting:** If you're traveling in more humid areas, mosquito netting can be a more light-weight alternative to a tent, and it can make a huge difference to how comfortable you are at night.
- **Dog poop bags:** for their shit in some places where you might get fined for not picking it up, or maybe even for your own if the urge hits at an extremely inconvenient time.
- **Books:** It's always good to have some reading material to keep yourself entertained!
- **Magic the Gathering Cards:** This one might just be me for me and a small handful of nerds, but if you have a road dog who plays, too, having MtG cards on hand can make your travels a whole lot of fun.
- **Camping Stove:** A small cooking setup can make food on the road way more enjoyable.

Food

- Be sure to have at least 2-3 days' worth of food on hand for all the humans and canines who might be in your crew. I focus on having vegan food that will be nutritious, high in protein, and enjoyable (and yes, it is possible for all of these things to be true while traveling as a vegan!). Being vegan as a hitchhiker can be surprisingly easy given that it's become way more accessible.
- Wraps are such an easy, go-to meal on the road. I usually have a bunch of tortillas, some kind of spread and/or sauce (like hummus, guacamole, sweet chili sauce,), vegan protein (field roast sausages, tofurkey slices/sausages, light life dogs, baked tofu, pouches/cans of beans, cans of UnMeat, vegan chili, seitan cubes, etc.), greens/other veggies, something crunchy (roasted

edamame, tortilla chips, takis, etc.), and anything else that sounds appetizing. I put tain on pretty much everything, but you can add whatever flavorings/hot stuff you like best.

- Oatmeal is another easy and versatile meal. You can do cold overnight oats (I especially like to do this in nearly empty nut butter jars) or use the boiling water at almost any gas station to make hot instant oats. I always carry some kind of nut and/or seed butter with me to mix into the oats and also like to add in fresh or dried fruit, jam, and nuts/seeds. If you want to be really decadent a lot of gas stations these days carry the Silk Oat-based creamer, which is free and can make the oats a lot creamier.
- Some easy snacks to bring along include: any number of the previously mentioned ingredients, vegan jerky, protein/Clif bars, bagels, carrots/celery/apples (careful with these since they add more weight than other options), lots of nori/seaweed, Walking Tamales (these are really tasty shelf-stable tamales that have become widely available), and Fritos bean dip because it's available at pretty much any gas station.

Who to Travel With

Only travel with people you truly trust! A traveling companion in this context is referred to as your road dog. Beyond that, it is key to travel with people with whom you would feel good about being in stressful and high-intensity situations. Any number of complicated circumstances may arise, sleeping will not always be comfortable, and the daily puzzle of survival might be fun for some people, but overwhelming and terrifying for others.

The less threatening you or the people in your group look to the outside world the easier it will be to get rides. The reality is that it is definitely easier for some people to get around than others. People also