

Getting Used To It

anon.

1966

FREIGHT TRAINS

You're on. You're moving. So now you read (if you can in a moving car), watch the countryside, wave at children, talk to any companions you may have, drink wine, write books, and groove train riding activities.

Now—even if you're on a fast freight—if it's going very far, the train is going to stop a couple little times to drop off and pick up cars. What you do, again—before you get off and very far away from your car—is ask one of the brakemen how long it's going to be before the train pulls out again, so that you won't get off and lose your train like I've done a couple of times.

O.K. So much for the theory and practice of train riding; Now we'll throw in a few miscellaneous train things.

1. The things yard bulls will bust you for (even where they don't for trespassing) are—Breaking into sealed cars, being very drunk, and starting fires.
2. Three old hobo things: You can make a mattress out of the old paper and cardboard that's left in cars after they're unloaded. Soft paper can be used as a lining inside your clothes—to act as insulation and a windbreak. The other is to stick a piece of wood a few inches out of a boxcar door — frame to keep the door from sliding closed (which isn't very likely anyway).
3. Piggybacks, flatcars, and gondolas are very good for sunbathing if you don't mind getting possibly wind-burned.
4. Don't ride on the sides or tops of cars for more than a few miles.
5. Most piggybacks have depressions in the middle where you can hide out of the wind and sleep without worrying about rolling off.
6. Getting on and off: Always assume that a train is going faster than it looks, it usually is. When you jump off a moving car, land running in the same direction it's going, getting down from the ladders on the side, put your forward foot out from the car, and set it down while letting the train's motion swing your body and other leg around, so that you land running in the same direction as the train, and at an angle away from it.
7. The people riding freights today are generally three types: Young people traveling cheap, "winos", and the disappearing "hobo"—the itinerant working man. (These days often a man who didn't bother to get a divorce.)
8. When doing any kind of traveling, it's a good idea to keep large bills out of sight—maybe in a baggie safely pinned inside your clothes.

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