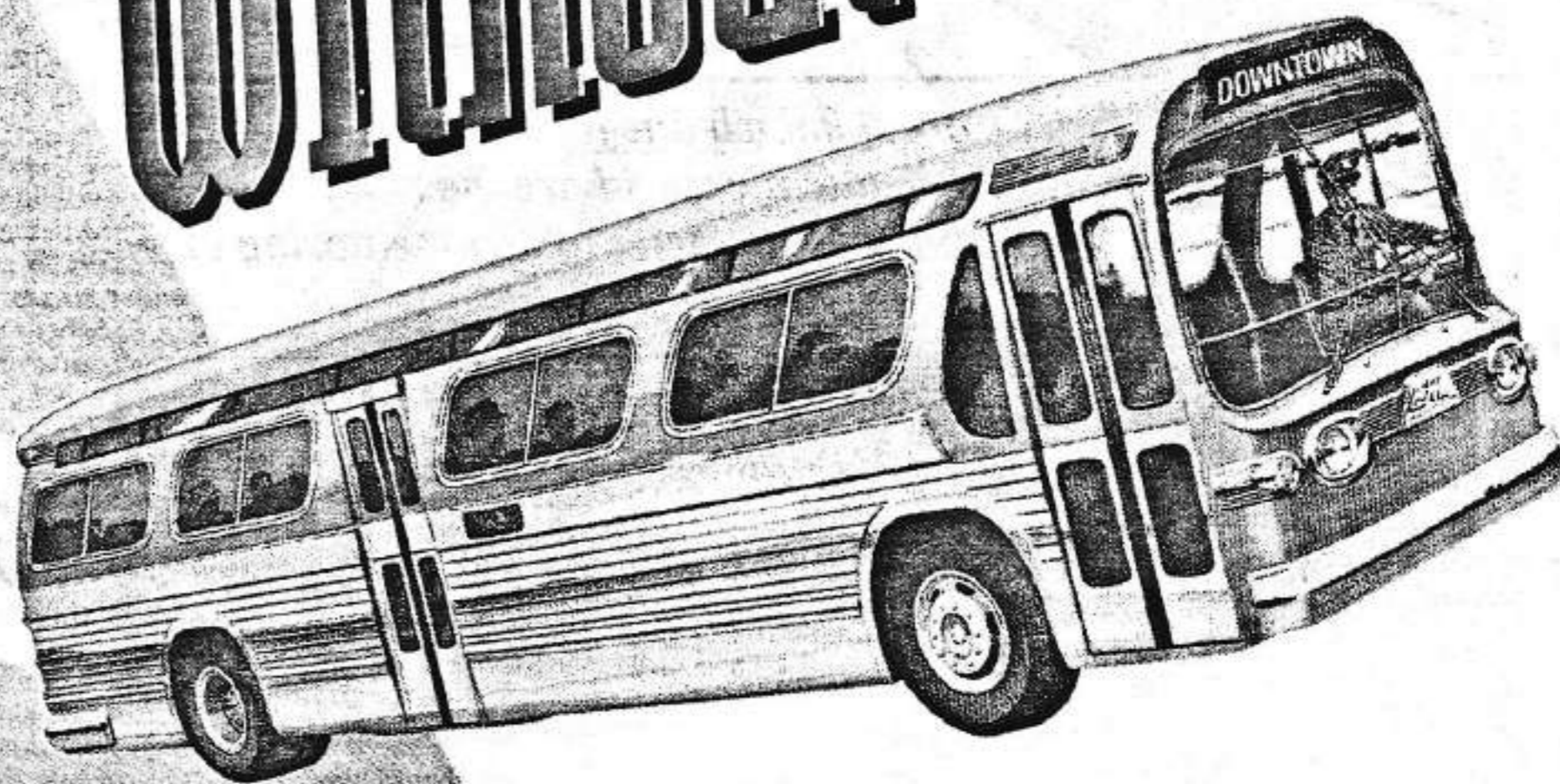



This World

NOVEMBER 17, 1991

California Without a Car



 *Just to prove it could be done, two people set out to ride from Tijuana to Oregon on public transit. They lived to tell the tale ...*

CALIFORNIA

--- WITHOUT A CAR ---

Two people's journey from Tijuana to Oregon — by bus, trolley, ferry and weary feet

BY ANNELI S. RUFUS AND KRISTAN LAWSON

People will laugh at us, I said. Oh, but we'll have fun, he said. It's nobody's idea of fun, I said, to travel 1,000 tortured miles on public transportation, enduring timetables and schedules and snarling Sprite-swilling drivers who demand exact change. And then there's downtown exhaust, and other people's screaming children, and who-knows-what on the seats. We'd spend what — two weeks? — with our thighs stuck to dark green vinyl, on a voyage punctuated by desolate waits at godforsaken outposts rumored to be bus stops.

But look, he said. Buses are such a liberating way to travel. They're cheap, they're reliable, and it's not your responsibility if they break down. On a bus you can eavesdrop and feel like Jack Kerouac. Come on, don't you want to prove that cars are unnecessary, that they poison the environment and create an insular, cold society? We could be crusaders, the first people ever to traverse California by city bus. The Lewis and Clark of public transportation!

Neither one of us, truth be told, knows how to drive.

He had sent away for timetables and with a purposeful finger traced a serpentine line on the map, from Tijuana to the Oregon border, north of Crescent City. "See? It is possible."

It was his idea, of course. The hare-brained schemes usually are. But then, so are the strokes of genius, the million-dollar lightbulbs that crackle and flash above his head in the middle of the night.

"Mm-hmmm," I said. Actually it was more of a bleat.

"Mm-hmmm" was all he needed.

We were on our way.

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Tijuana to San Ysidro

Distance 1/4 mile Mode Walk Price Free

We had entered Mexico for the sole purpose of turning around and leaving, to give ourselves the satisfaction of having really begun at the beginning.

You enter the United States through a turnstile. There is no turnstile between Austria and Slovenia, or between Rwanda and Zaire. It was as if someone wanted us to believe we were in Disneyland already, that the whole country, entered thus, must be a vast amusement park. We jostled honeymooners clutching Miss Piggy pinatas and bottles of Kahlua as a tense-jawed customs inspector silently waved us through.

North of the border, the air no longer smelled like beef sizzling languorously on a spit.

The first tourist attraction you encounter upon entering the United States is the San Ysidro McDonald's, scene of a bloody mass murder a few years back. And then there is the freeway, where border-jumpers get squashed like rabbits, blinded by the headlights as they make the dash for El Norte. You read about these things in the San Diego Union.

San Ysidro to Downtown San Diego

Distance 16 miles Mode San Diego Trolley Price \$1.50 each

Across the street from the McDon-



On the bus from Ukiah to Willits

ald's is the final stop of the San Diego Trolley, inaccurately but affectionately called the Tijuana Trolley. Unlike BART or any big-city subway, it has no gates or turnstiles preventing daredevil non-payers from hitching free rides. As on most European commuter trains, passengers are trusted to be honest.

We waited for the trolley alongside milk-fed towheads, their tiny skulls obscured by brand-new straw sombreros as wide as car tires, thin necks fighting to stay erect under the hats' ponderous weight. Looking back over their shoulders, they drawled, "So that was Mexico?"

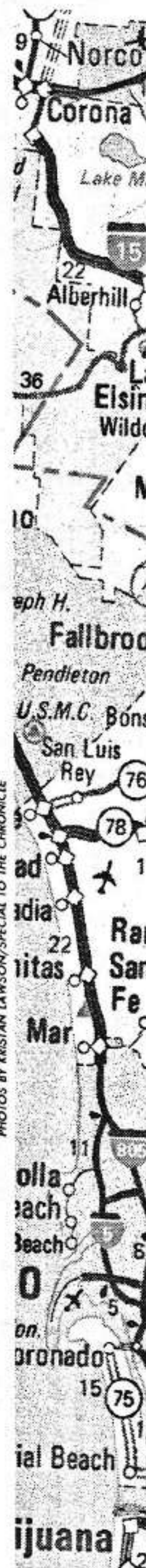
Above, border patrol helicopters scanned the industrial wasteland for illegal aliens. The trolley was clean and fire-engine red, slicing efficiently past junk-strewn back yards and walls festooned with swirls of gang graffiti. Then, abruptly, we found ourselves in downtown San Diego.

Downtown San Diego to University Towne Center

Distance 12 miles Mode San Diego Transit No.150 Price \$1.50 each

San Diego is absolutely, thickly bilingual. You are expected, really ex-

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CALIFORNIA

Continued From Previous Page

pected, to do everything in Spanish. Chinese bus drivers are expected to know Spanish, so they do. We boarded a suburb-bound express bus, and through outer San Diego we rode, land of fitness centers and happy-hour margaritas, as a work day ended in the Southland.

University Towne Center to Oceanside

Distance 25 Miles Mode N. San Diego County Transit No. 310 Price Free with transfer

We searched for a snack at University Towne Center, but don't kid yourself. Any mall with "Towne" in its name is a gourmand's nightmare. We waited hungrily at the stop along with two guitar-strumming Mexican boys.

The bus came. Its driver was a jittery woman who jerked the bus to spastic stops and starts, and gnashed her teeth when speed bumps reared up in her path. Once we hit the freeway she flew past Del Mar, past lagoons and half-built shopping centers and into foggy, drizzly Oceanside.

Oceanside to San Clemente

Distance 25 Miles Mode N. San Diego County Transit No. 305 Price 65 cents each

Oceanside bristled with crew-cut Marines who stumbled, red-eyed, against each other as they boarded the bus at the station. Leave was over. The driver was an ex-Marine drill sergeant with steely sharpshooter eyes sunk in a rippling sea of flesh.

We cruised through Camp Pendleton at twilight. The driver careened wildly past "Tank Crossing" signs and white-helmeted military police, and even the devil-may-care jarheads started fidgeting when he blasted through a stop sign in the twilight, foot solidly on the accelerator.

At dusk we re-entered civilian territory.

End of first day

San Clemente to Dana Point

Distance 8 Miles Mode Orange Co. Transit No. 91 Price \$1 each

A pigtailed backpacker straggled her way to the bus stop, bare thighs quivering in the morning chill. "Have you a bus schedule?" she asked. British. She said she wanted to go to Mission "San Jew-on Capistrano." She had spent her life never having need of the Spanish J! She had never properly pronounced *javelina* or *jai alai*, to say nothing of *San Jose*! What a big world it is, after all.

The bus came and carried us through bougainvillea-laced suburbs and then to Dana Point. We waited on the bench at the side of the road. It seemed that everybody on Earth was at that moment driving a car, touring down Dana Point's main street, hell-bent for some 7-Eleven.

Dana Point to Newport Beach

Distance 18 miles Mode Orange County Transit No. 97 Price 5 cents each with transfer

The landscape here has a lulling, rhythmic quality: cinnamon hills coming to kneel down humbly at the

seashore. In bygone days these hills must have been positively hypnotic, when the salt wind sang, mild, through the grasses. Now the bluffs are chiseled into terraces, bristling with condominiums — with blustery names like "Windermere Cay" and "The Admiralty" — and designed to resemble New England seaport villages.

Newport Beach to Long Beach Veterans Administration Hospital

Distance 15 miles Mode Orange County Transit No. 85 Price Free with transfer

How seductive this coastline is! How tempting the sand, how splendid and clean! How exasperatingly perfect, like a scene in a Viewmaster toy. Grand and spic-and-span are the homes; brand new Tudor-style mansions, and wannabe haciendas, and this-is-the-good-life ranch-style sprawlers. In its sneaky way, this coast is the great California truth. Offering up Newport, Laguna, Sunset, Seal Beach, one jewel after the other, this coast tempts you, like Satan: Hey, Californian! Would you live here if you could, and always be warm, always be tanned, surrounded by beauty? Could you resist?

Somewhere on the northern fringes of Seal Beach the view from the bus window starts changing. Orange County's burnished golden mirror of paradise grows tarnished. Roadside litter, then greasy oil wells. As you cross the line into Los Angeles County you can almost feel the bump as you land back in the real world.

of L.A. A man slouched aboard at Compton, lemon-yellow sweat suit unzipped to the midriff. Against his broad mahogany chest hung a chain with links as big as Cheerios. A Lilliputian gold handgun dangled between plum-colored nipples.

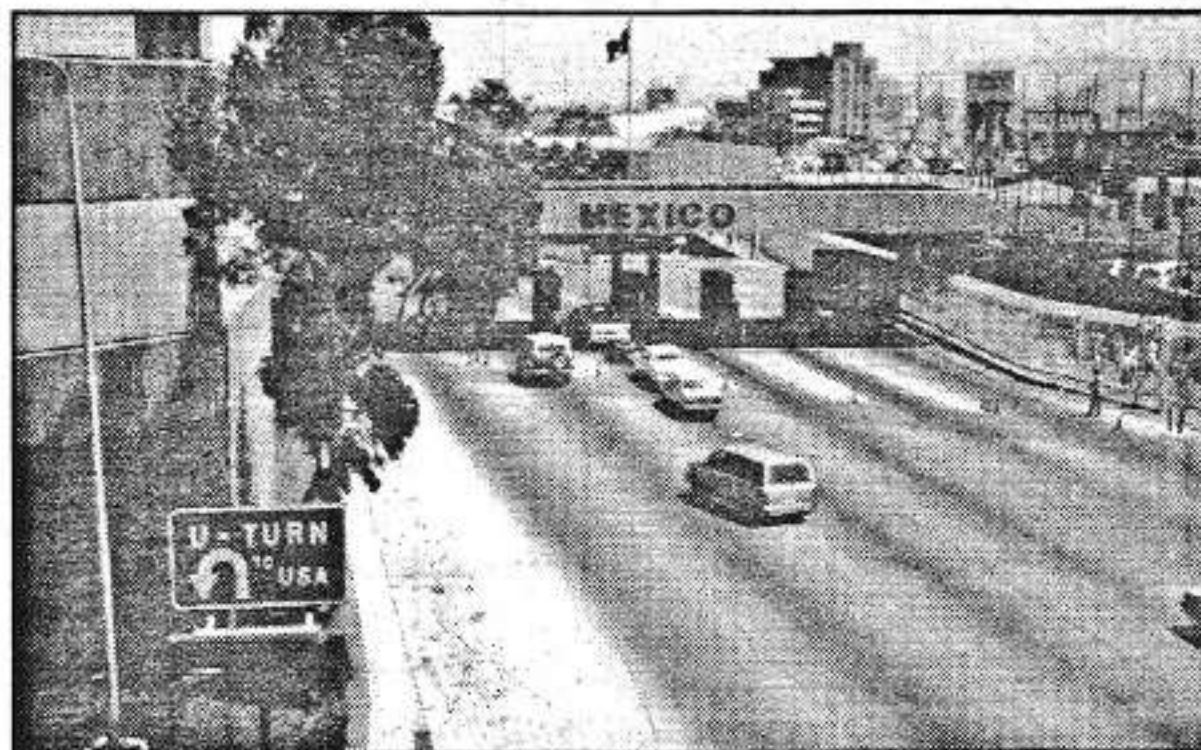
We could almost have been riding some steam-belching choo-choo in the Old West — this scenery is so parched, vacant and dun-colored. But this is not the emptiness of frontier; it is the emptiness of civilization: boarded-up warehouses and burned-out houses and unpeopled shopping centers.

Then you reach downtown and dis-

curb, promising peace and quiet and conditioned air all the way to the San Fernando Valley. But first, there was the choking stop-and-start through the rest of downtown, through gritty, forlorn, unsung Chinatown. Then the fringes of Hollywood beckoned at the edge of the freeway. Just out of sight were restaurants masquerading as enormous hot dogs and doughnuts, and UFO churches and elegant palm trees with anorexic bodies and wild heads that looked almost human. We had to admit we kind of loved it. Southern California gets under your skin, like ringworm.



The San Diego Trolley at San Ysidro station



The Tijuana border crossing

Long Beach VA Hospital to Long Beach Blue Line

Distance 5 miles Mode Long Beach Transit No. 94 Price 10 cents each for transfer

After a brief picnic on the sun-splashed lawn of a gas station (of all things), we crossed the street to get in line for the Long Beach Transit No. 94. Freed from the bureaucracy of L.A. and its vast RTD bus system to the north, Long Beach Transit happily and humbly shuttles passengers around this workaday city-beneath-a-city, making do with refurbished cast-off buses.

Long Beach Blue Line to Downtown Los Angeles

Distance 22 miles Mode Blue Line Metro Price \$1.10 each

The bus dropped us off near the terminus of Los Angeles' resurrected interurban commuter train. The Blue Line, clean and new and a marvel, trundles along through the back roads

embark. Los Angeles' breezes are too darkly sullen, too thick and gassy, to be made of ordinary air. Breezes here are irritating, like coughs. They rattle the signs that quiver above rattletrap cafe doorways, reading: The Kitchen for Everybody. The Place for the Sandwiches. Off the Blue Line, we scuttled along the street — faces down and away from the battery-acid sun — as all the tawny, rushing, polyglot hordes of downtown hustled and knuckled past us wearing metallic tank tops and Day-Glo sneakers. We waited in front of a cavernous 1930s cafeteria whose wide walls were painted with cool forest murals. A real faux brook tumbled coyly past the diners, who sat grimly chewing roast beef.

Downtown Los Angeles to Woodland Hills

Distance 22 miles Mode RTD No. 424 Price \$2.15 each

The bus sidled skillfully to the

No one had ever told me that Tarzana and Encino, deep in the valley, were Pacific-Rim versions of Palm Beach, where sun-tanned, sunglasses suburban ladies in white tennis shorts dawdled in diners with names like Bagels Etcetera! and then motored down boulevards lined with pepper trees, kosher butchers and ballet academies. This was a part of L.A. that we had never seen — too hot out there, always — but that throbbed with a warm-hearted, hedonistic, endearingly glitzy sweetness.

Woodland Hills to Ventura

Distance 45 miles Mode Great American Stage Line Price \$11 each

As we left the valley, soft little oak-clad hills, the color of smoke, stretched north and west as Los Angeles finally sighed and died away behind us. Dusk fell as we entered a new phase of Southern California: the mellow, take-it-easy central coast, where dapple-gray polo ponies and lemon groves flourish. California's gods, if any exist, must live somewhere between Agoura and Pismo Beach.

Ventura sprawled gracelessly, like a yawn. We would not have chosen to stay here, in the shadow of gas stations and Toys R Us, but there were no public buses leading northward from town. We knew what we had to do.

End of second day

Ventura to Carpinteria

Distance 15 miles Mode Walk Price Free

In the morn, knowing with leaden certainty that a 15-mile hike loomed between here and dinner, we lurched into the unknown. For a while we walked along the deserted beach, but the sand hobbled us, so we switched

to the railroad track for a few miles, hopping from tie to weathered tie and leaping off into the brush when a train hurtled past. We reached a curving oceanfront bike path, and stepped innocently into the midst of a triathlon. We dodged the wheezing, panting runners and hopped onto the shoulder of the highway, following a five-mile wagon train of Winnebagos parked nose-to-tail along the shore. This was not ordinarily hikers' territory, and people peered at us through their nylon-curtained windows as if we were yetis.

Walking this many miles strips layers of civilization from your skin. We marched like donkeys, musky, our steps comfortably rhythmical. Down another few miles of railroad track,

walked all the way from Ventura?") and asked us all kinds of questions. But as more passengers got on, it was back to business, and we were once more just riders en route to Santa Barbara, bobbing along through the sunny-bungalow streets of Carpinteria and then Summerland, which in the '20s and '30s was a utopian community of spiritualists: the seance capital of California.

Santa Barbara to Goleta
Distance 8 miles Mode MTD No.11 Price Free with transfer

I hadn't been up State Street for nearly 15 years. When I was a student at the University of California at Santa Barbara, I did it all the time. There's something about riding an old famil-

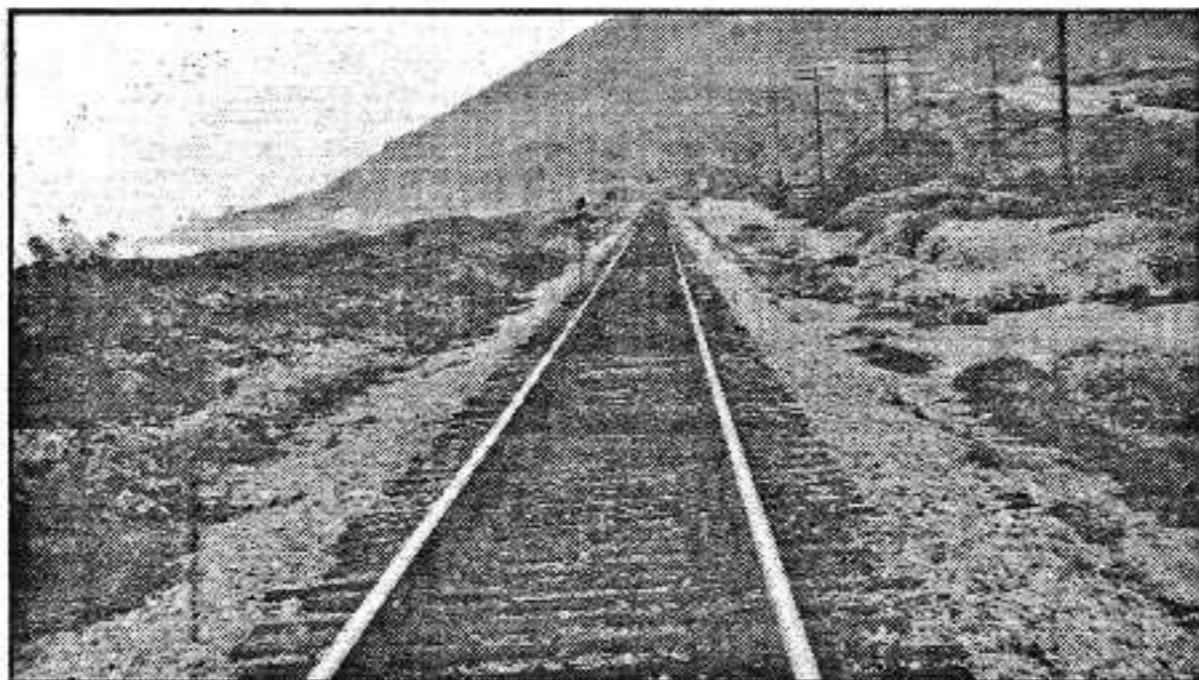
he said. "Santa Maria," he said slowly, tasting the name as if it were baked beans.

"Been in the pen," he murmured. He held up a manila envelope, shook it. It jangled wanly. "My worldly possessions," he said. "Got caught with a million dollars' worth of coke and heroin. They took away my house. Houses, actually. Been in Tehachapi. First thing I did when I got out, I got drunk."

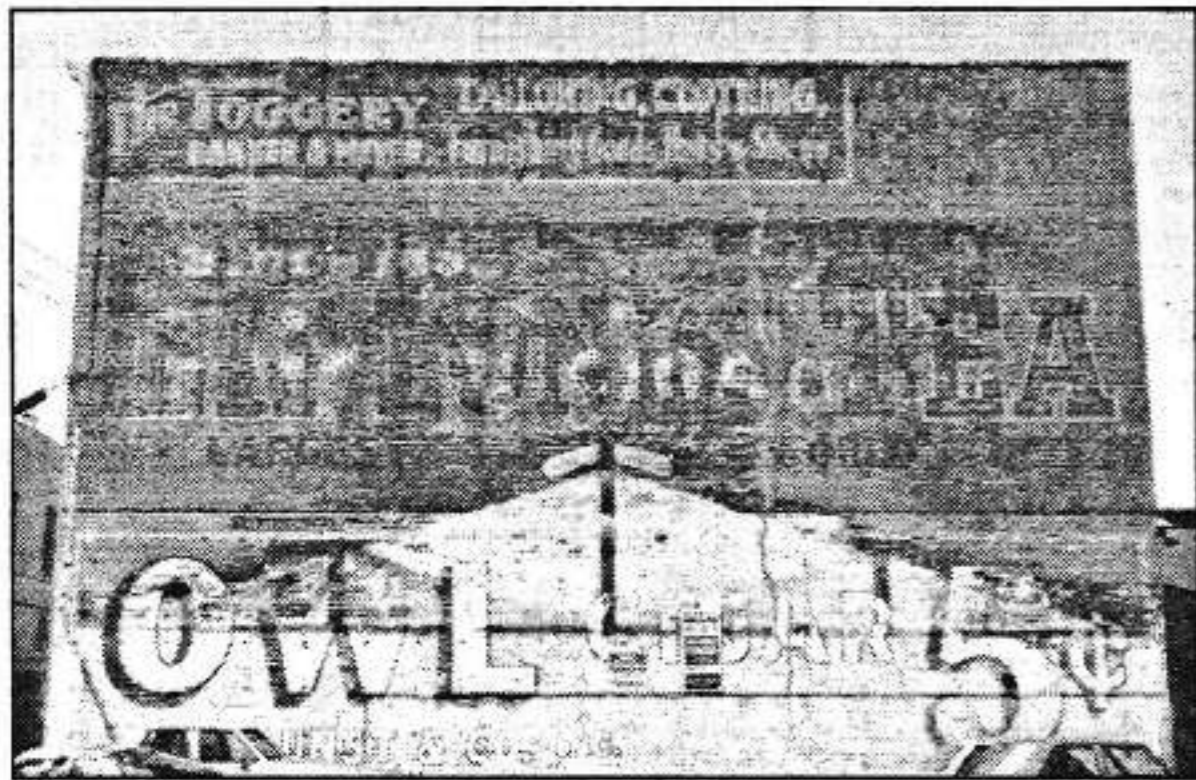
"Anyone would have," I lied, feeling, absurdly, that I must protect him from the world because he was a sad showoff misfit, and meanwhile wanting to wave my arms and shout, "There's an ex-con confiding in me!"

In Santa Maria we coasted into a cozy vest-pocket Greyhound station.

The stifling day made you feel sorry for Father Junipero Serra and his missionaries and the Indians and everyone else who ever had to march across this blazing territory without sunglasses



North of Ventura



Ukiah

past a banana plantation that beckoned like a mirage by the side of the road, around glittering Rincon Point. Under a freeway overpass, where a slow-voiced patrolman asked us our business and into a culvert that accessed the road to Carpinteria.

Carpinteria to Santa Barbara
Distance 12 miles Mode MTD No. 20 Price 75 cents each

Blistered, dazzled, we stumbled out of the culvert. The bus stop was a vision, neat and pert, on a corner at the edge of an office complex.

The bus driver could have been a Vietnam vet, craggy-voiced and tattooed, with a pork-barrel body and a thin whip of a graying ponytail. We blurted out what we had just done, just to hear ourselves say it. "We've just walked all the way from Ventura!" The driver barked satisfyingly ("You just

iar bus route, where you recognize without strain all those landmarks, and your eyes and your mind reach out as if to stroke each tile-roofed dentist's office, each dusty-pink motel. It's a comfort.

Goleta to Santa Maria
Distance 70 miles Mode Greyhound Price \$12.65 each

This is one of those few swatches of California not traversed by public transportation. But tonight, feeling flush as Diamond Jim Brady, we splurged and rode the 'Hound, delighting in its power. After days of riding city buses, the Greyhound felt like a yacht.

We zipped through Lompoc. The man across the aisle from me, in the dark intimate way of night bus rides, confided that he was glad to be coming home at last. Been away five years,

"Gonna call my folks," said the con brightly, brandishing a quarter. "I hope they're home."

End of third day

Downtown Santa Maria to Northern Santa Maria
Distance 1 1/2 miles Mode Santa Maria Area Transit No. 2 Price 90 cents each

The next morning, unseasonably cold, we strolled to the covered mall parking lot that served as transit center for tiny, isolated Santa Maria Area Transit (SMAT to locals). The entire system had four buses, each heading out in a different direction from the mall. The No. 2 went north, so we hopped aboard, and spent the entire five-minute ride futilely trying to ask the sullen driver where we should get off. She eventually responded by pulling over at her most northerly stop and pointing wordlessly out the open door.

Santa Maria to Nipomo
Distance 6 miles Mode Walk Price Free

We thought this walk would be a snap, a five-mile stroll through the gentle country elbow of agricultural Southern California. We set out on the shoulder of the highway, whistling.

Highway turned to byway, the fields wide and loamy all around, with farmhouses set way back from the road. We tramped optimistically for two miles, with only roadkill for company.

We came upon a shack with a couple inside, selling homegrown vegetables. As almost no one used this road, they had almost no one to sell to. But then, they had almost nothing to sell. One onion languished in a crate. A

pair of slender potatoes huddled at the bottom of a tub. For a quarter, we bought all seven of their Italian plums, heavy with nectar. The rooftops of Nipomo were yet to heave into sight, and we were starting to worry.

A lady — surely she was more than just a woman — purred up alongside us in a long white Chrysler, sunglasses perched on long thin nose, rolled down her window and drawled, "Would you folks like a lift?"

How could we accept? We were on a mission. The whole point behind this trip was to prove that cars weren't necessary. Wistfully, we declined.

The road seemed to stretch on forever, the horizon receding as we approached it. We passed fields of ripe strawberries and whole families of farm workers, bent double, picking the fruits one by one.

We reached a street sign, and then another, and then we found ourselves standing in front of a mini-mart on a corner that, according to the bus route map, was a bus stop.

Nipomo to Arroyo Grande
Distance 9 miles Mode Walk Price Free

We asked the mini-mart's cashier if she knew where the bus pulled up. She blinked. "Bus?"

Fine. We marched to the phone booth and called the bus company headquarters.

"I'd like to ask about the exact location of a certain bus stop."

"Certainly, sir. Where are you?" "Orchard Avenue and Division Street. We're waiting for the No. 10."

Long pause. "What city are you in, sir?"

"Nipomo."

Longer pause. "The No. 10 doesn't go to Nipomo, sir."

"Yes it does. I'm looking at the route map right now."

"What's the date on the map, sir?" "July 1991. It's only a month old."

"I'm sorry, but that map's out of date. We canceled the run to Nipomo because no one ever used it."

"You canceled it when?"

"Yesterday."

We walked another three hours to Arroyo Grande.

Arroyo Grande to Grover City
Distance 2 miles Mode South County Area Transit No. 3 Price 50 cents each

The moment we stumbled into Arroyo Grande a bus pulled up in front of us, as if it had been waiting offstage for its cue. We fell into the nearest seats, happy — ecstatic, actually — to be off our feet. But when we told the driver we were headed for Pismo Beach, she pityingly informed us we had to transfer at the end of the line to an entirely different transit system.

So, with weary legs, we scampered through a freakish tropical downpour across a plush Grover City lawn to another bus waiting patiently on the far side of a public park.

Grover City to Pismo Beach
Distance 2 miles Mode Central Coast Area Transit No. 10 Price 50 cents each with transfer

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We rumbled past Halcyon, a nearly vanished utopian community founded a century ago by the nutball 36th Order of Wisdom, into the low-key, salty coastal resort of Pismo Beach. Originally called *Pismu* in a local Indian language, it is the only town in the world named after the blobs of beach tar that stick to the soles of your feet.

End of fourth day

Pismo Beach to San Luis Obispo
Distance 12 miles Mode Central Coast Area Transit No. 10 Price 75 cents each

We were up early and at the bus stop. The sky was heavy blue, the sun already so hot we instinctively sought shade, like lizards. A hangdog sort of man sat on the bench plunging one cigaret after another between his beard-fringed lips, sucking desperately, like a deep-sea diver grabbing for a ruptured air hose.

We slid in alongside him. "I'm down to six packs a day," he smiled.

"Down to six packs?"

"Used to be 10," he shrugged.

Two blocks away, sea gulls were keening over the beach. A town full of tourists awoke — it will be indolence and sunburn and fish dinners for them — but we were off and away, inland.

San Luis Obispo to Paso Robles
Distance 28 miles Mode Central Coast Area Transit No. 9 Price \$1.50 each

This stifling day made you feel sorry for Father Junipero Serra and his missionaries and the Indians and everyone else who ever had to march across this blazing territory without sunglasses. The Golden State is golden because of more than ore: The sun bakes it, burnishes it, like a savory roasted potato. And nowhere is the state more golden than in the hills outside San Luis Obispo.

The bus was one of the most comfortable, up-to-date specimens we'd ridden so far, a quick, compact little burro of a minibus that climbed uncomplaining through the chaparral. Our fellow passengers, locals, would in another era have been young missionary monks, or *vaqueros*, or tough, stalwart farm boys. But now they were spotty-faced, slack-eyed youths whose bright fiberglass skateboards kept slipping through their sleepy fingers and skittering into the aisle.

The only passenger who remained fully awake through this ride was a bowlegged woman in a tight lavender sun dress, who sat up front and talked to the driver. "Phew, it's hot. D'you think my hair spray can's gonna explode in this heat? I left it on the front seat of my car."

At Paso Robles she stumped out of the bus, and everyone watched apprehensively as she crossed the street to where her car was parked. In the shimmering heat she raised a hand and signaled to the driver that her hair spray can was, in fact, A-OK.

Paso Robles to Salinas
Distance 98 miles Mode Greyhound Price \$16.25 each

Paso Robles is the end of the line for central California's modest but convoluted transit network. The only buses in the barren, depopulated swatch between here and Salinas are a few wheezing workhorses for schoolchildren in King City, useless to interurban adventurers like us. Along Highway 1 a bus goes as far north as San Simeon, and another bus comes south from Monterey as far as Big Sur, but between San Simeon and Big Sur there is nothing — no buses, no taxis, no way to walk. So inland to Paso Robles it is, and then Greyhound up 101.

The Greyhound arrived late, but once we got going the driver was smooth, a professional. You could hardly discern our speed until you looked out the front window and saw Trans Ams and customized pickups swerving to get out of our way.

Salinas to Watsonville
Distance 22 miles Mode Monterey-Salinas Transit No. 29 Price \$2 each

This is not tourist country; this is country that takes care of itself, and Salinas is an un-self-conscious town. Sun-browned *braceros* boarded the bus along with us, their steps heavy, voices work-weary but warm. "E-e-ey, *payaso!*" Hey, dude! Hey, clown! Past *carnicerias* and *panaderias* we went matter-of-factly, and ancient Chinese cafes whose neon signs boasted "Chop Suey" ... and then into thorny acres of artichokes, and Castroville's restaurant with the 10-foot cement artichoke standing out front like a pastel sentry.

After Watsonville, Corralitos was rural, the kind of place that has lanes and picket fences, and it seemed so perfect that one hesitates to print its name here lest the whole town flutter off the Earth like a mirage.

Corralitos turned into sleek green Aptos, with its French restaurants, and then up and down the green dales into smart, pretty Santa Cruz.

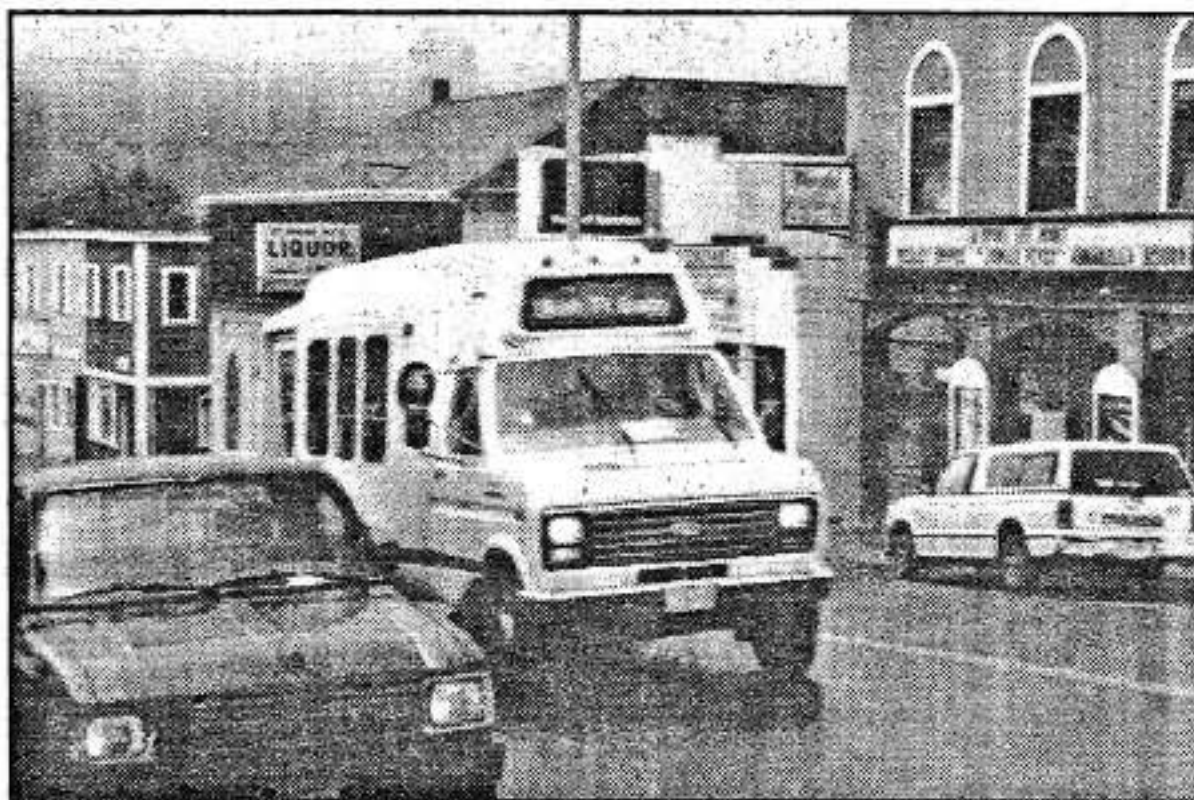
End of fifth day

Santa Cruz to Ben Lomond
Distance 10 miles Mode Santa Cruz Metro No. 35 Price \$1 each

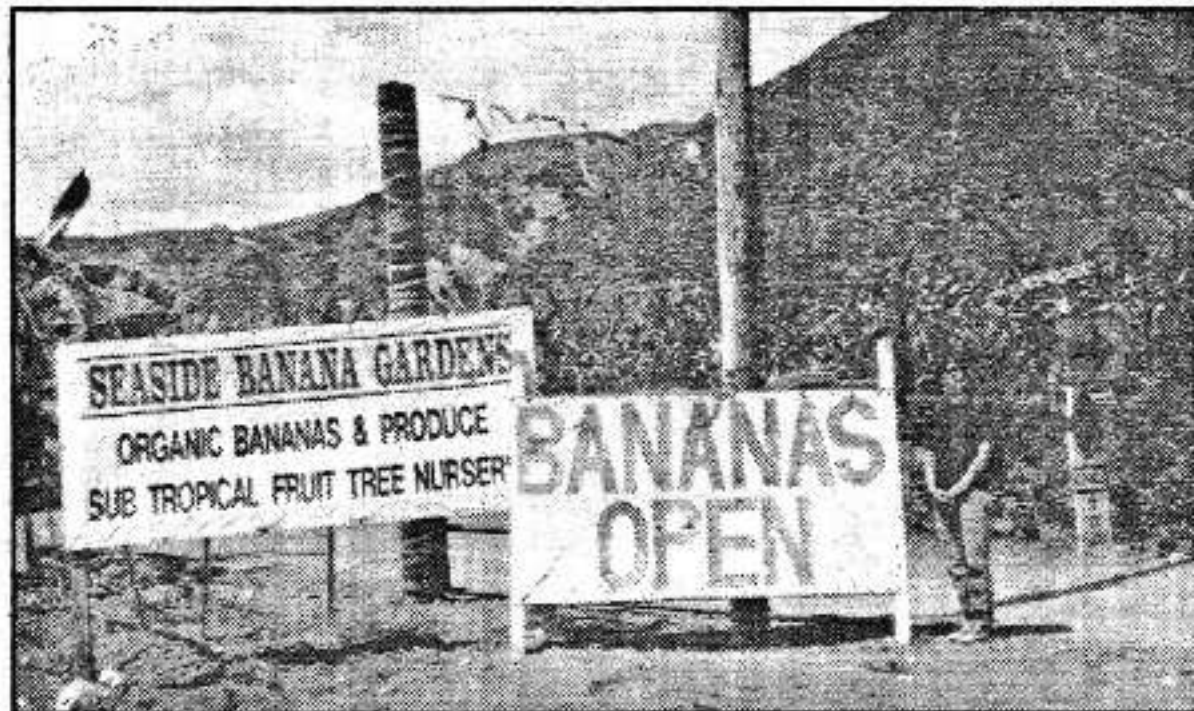
We dawdled in Santa Cruz. It was nearly dusk when we boarded the No.

Our plan was to take the No. 35 back to Santa Cruz, where we would transfer to a bus that shuttled commuters to San Jose. But halfway down the mountain our bus met the San Jose-bound bus as it passed us heading north. Without warning, several passengers leapt from the No. 35 and dashed across the street. On impulse, we followed, dodging traffic willy-nilly, lunging at the last moment in the door as the driver started to pull away. When you're young, stunts like that can be fun. When you're young.

Scotts Valley to San Jose
Distance 26 miles Mode Highway 17 Express Bus Price \$2 each



Early morning in Point Arena



Co-author Rufus, south of Carpinteria

Just past Castroville, and somewhere around Elkhorn Slough, a funny thing happened. We rounded a bend (or maybe it just felt like a bend), and suddenly the stunning heat lifted, the stubborn lying-down golden land picked itself up and became rolling and green. Gnarled pines shaded the road and stood shoulder-to-shoulder all the way from the sea to the hills. We rolled uncomplaining into their embrace. This was Northern California, climatologically speaking. You can feel it happen, right there around Elkhorn Slough.

Watsonville to Santa Cruz
Distance 19 miles Mode Santa Cruz Metro No. 71 Price \$1 each

Watsonville's storefronts stand like prisoners of war, their windows eyeing the dump trucks and cranes that painstakingly restore, brick by brick, the wrongs done by the Loma Prieta earthquake in October 1989.

35, heading up Highway 9 to woody Ben Lomond, where we had made reservations for the night.

In Felton, some high school boys started yelling out the window to a gaggle of passing girls, who agreeably paused for a round of vigorous flirting. The girls couldn't have been more than 14, but boy, were they — how shall we put it? — grown-up.

When the bus pulled away, it was hound-dog heaven. The boys hooted back and forth across the aisle, detailing with authority each girl's physical attributes, proclivities and impressive sexual histories. They would have said more if a scrawny 10th-grader hadn't pointed out that one of them was his younger sister.

End of sixth day

Ben Lomond to Scotts Valley
Distance 5 miles Mode Santa Cruz Metro No. 35 Price \$1 each

We half-expected the bus, huffing along past Ukiah's Old West storefronts, to sprout a big gloved hand, wave and shout 'Howdy!' We went past Victorian farmhouses with sprawling front yards and spiky iron fences. This was run-through-the-sprinklers, lemonade-in-summer country.

To this very moment we have no idea who runs the Highway 17 bus, or to which transit agency it belongs. We know only that it goes over the spooky Santa Cruz Mountains, past once-holy Holy City, where in the '10s and '20s a fringe Christian sect held forth, down into the valley to San Jose. We even asked the driver (who ought to know) directly, but her response — "Well, it comes out of Santa Cruz, but the money goes to San Jose" — was none too illuminating.

San Jose to Fremont
Distance 18 miles Mode Santa Clara Transportation Agency No. 180 Price \$1 each

We reached San Jose in the pale light of midmorning, when all sane residents were off the street, indoors, at work. Across the street from a low-slung, somnolent train station, our bus stop stood abandoned and forsaken, like a phantom island whose fate is to

come alive during commute hours only.

When the bus arrived, it was empty and also somehow supernatural, like a magic carpet, or like that huge wooden shoe that bobs, boat-like, through the world of dreams. Our eyes kept straying toward the "Watch Your Step" and "Exit to the Rear" signs printed in Vietnamese. Printed there so large and official, it meant that history had taken place, was taking place.

Northward we went, past the blurry borderland where Santa Clara County imperceptively merges into Alameda County, leaving every last wisp of southernness behind.

Fremont to Hayward

Distance 10 miles Mode BART Price 90 cents each

BART! Old buddy! BART represents home, and reaching the Fremont BART station felt like a homecoming. Sociologists always pester people with annoying questions about group identification. ("Do you think of yourself

Berkeley BART to Home

Distance 1/2 mile Mode Walk Price Free

Like adventurers home from a safari, we shouldered our thrift store purchases — the spangled velvet ruby-red sombrero, the clanking set of golf clubs, the fragile old Hawaiian 78s, the big blue gourd — and marched down the street from BART to home. But we were gone again soon enough, as if home were just another Lazy K Motel.

End of seventh day

Berkeley to Oakland Waterfront

Distance 5 miles Mode AC Transit No. 51 Price \$1 each

They say the longest journey begins with but a single step. This time, the most far-flung transportation adventure began with the familiar AC Transit No. 51, which passes within two blocks of our house. So, with packs full of fresh clothes and new bus schedules, we clambered on a bus we see every day. Except this time it wasn't taking us shopping or to a dim sum restaurant: It was taking us to Oregon.

the city. Out on deck the wind howled in our ears. Wish we could do this every day, we crowed, knowing that even if we could, we wouldn't. The boat made a stop at the Ferry Building, but we stayed on all the way to Pier 39.

S.F. Pier 39 to S.F. Ferry Building

Distance 1 1/4 miles Mode Muni No. 32 Price Free with transfer

We fled through Pier 39 and crossed the street to the Muni No. 32. We had expected a quick cruise down the Embarcadero, but the demolition of the Embarcadero Freeway forced the bus into a careening, gasping, stop-and-start detour through San Francisco's northeastern fringe. At last we arrived at the very place we had been just 20 minutes earlier.

S.F. Ferry Building to S.F. Transbay Terminal

Distance 1/2 mile Mode Walk Price Free

Our romantic dream of ferrying our way from Berkeley to Marin County beached itself at the Golden Gate Transit ferry office, where we learned that, were we to take the Larkspur ferry, we might not make it to Santa Rosa in time to catch the one and only bus heading north. We scurried through the Financial District to the Transbay Terminal, where Golden Gate Transit No. 80 waited, purring, to whisk us northward into the Redwood Empire.

S.F. Transbay Terminal to Santa Rosa

Distance 57 miles Mode Golden Gate Transit No. 80 Price \$3.70 each

In the Tenderloin, a man tried to get on without paying. The driver ordered, "Get off the bus," to no avail, and then he began yelling, but the man remained by the fare box, muttering.

The driver lunged out of his seat and flung the fareless man out onto the sidewalk. A collective astonished gasp arose from the passengers, followed by a tense silence as the man calmly got up, dusted himself off, and again approached the bus, whimpering and beseeching. The driver slammed the door in his face and roared off.

A group of nervous Russian tourists got off just before the Golden Gate Bridge toll booth, zipping up their Windbreakers for the walk across. And off we went, over the most famous bridge in the world, past the shutter-clicking hordes at Vista Point, through the rainbow tunnel, skimming above the backside of dreamy Sausalito and down into Marin's interior. Here's something we've always been afraid to admit: Viewed from Highway 101, Marin County is a little bit ugly. There, it's off our chests.

Santa Rosa to Point Arena

Distance 85 miles Mode Mendocino Transit Authority Point Arena Bus Price \$5.50 each

The man in the Bultaco visor was going to be trouble. We all knew that from square one. But fellow bus passengers are like your parents: You can't pick 'em.

Right away he shouted things like, "I gotta piss! Sorry, ladies, urinate," and kept clapping passengers on the back as urban Santa Rosa faded into fruitful Sebastopol and then the cool

coast.

"I saw Hendrix in Golden Gate Park," he shouted as we left Tomales, tugging the sleeve of a freckle-faced surfer who might as well have been made of wood. "I went to Mexico and the whores cost \$8!"

End of eighth day

Point Arena to Ukiah

Distance 45 miles Mode Mendocino Transit Authority Ukiah Bus Price \$4.40 each

Just outside Point Arena, in the soft-focus hush of early morning, we stopped beside a farm gate to pick up four workers, three men and a woman, who were fleeing for the city on a rare day off. The men were rawboned, the woman sturdy in a flowered cotton dress. They slept, heads lolling, as we whipped past placid cow pastures and hidden sea coves swiftly glimpsed, magical, a collage in shades of gray.

Through the Anderson Valley, then, as comfortable as flannel. Then twisting and turning all the way to good-humored, old-fashioned Ukiah, with its huge wheezing old pickup trucks and 5-cent-cigar advertisements fading away on brick walls.

Ukiah to Willits

Distance 20 miles Mode Mendocino Transit Authority No. 20 Price \$1.65 each

In a jaunty pine lean-to we waited for our connection. We half-expected the bus, huffing along past Ukiah's Old West storefronts, to sprout a big gloved hand, wave and shout "Howdy!"

We were the only passengers all through the outskirts of town, past Victorian farmhouses with sprawling front yards and spiky iron fences. This was run-through-the-sprinklers, lemonade-in-summer country. In the bus was a stern warning, hand-lettered in Magic Marker, that read, "Keep hands or arms inside the bus at all times," presenting us with a perplexing choice. Still no one else got on as we zipped down straight country roads, feeling like absurd royalty. In downtown Willits, the driver, who was missing an index finger, pointed nevertheless to a pretty little park, where we picnicked, only to learn that such parks are not all rural innocence: The men's public rest room was a gay rendezvous spot; a man tried to sell us dope; and a child hid behind a bench and squirted us with a water pistol.

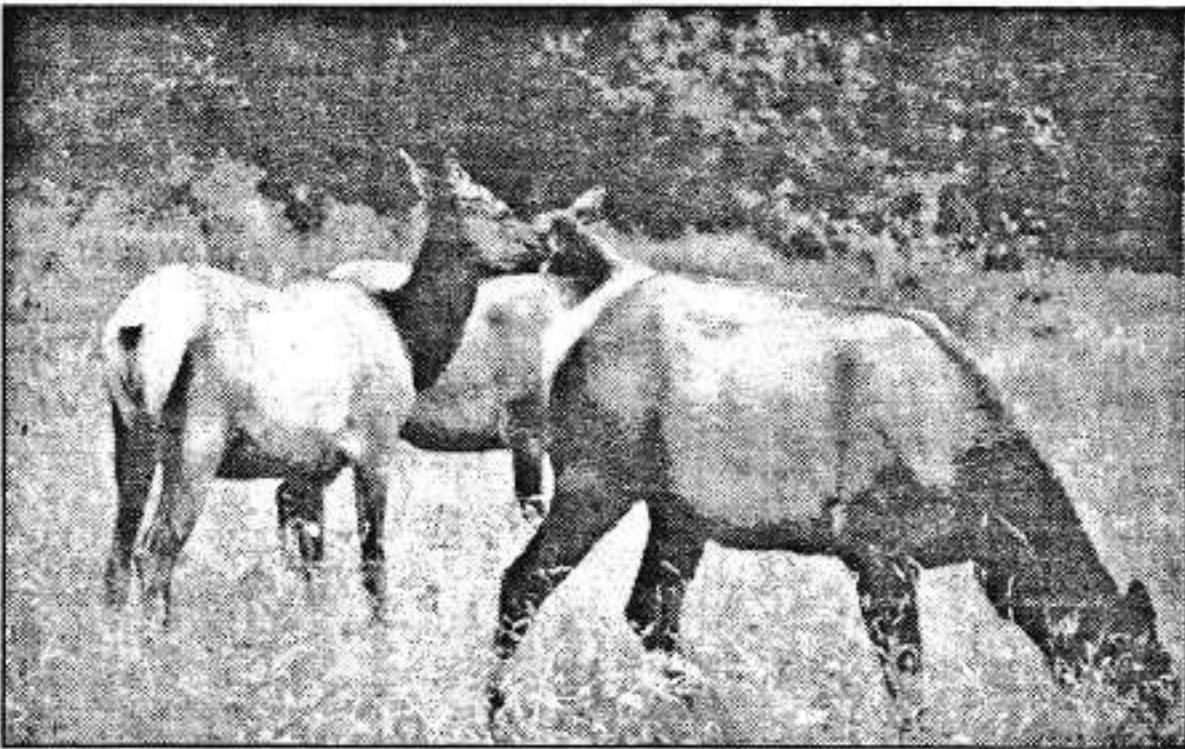
Willits to Rio Dell

Distance 110 miles Mode Greyhound Price \$18.20 each

Willits is the final outpost of the Bay Area's urban agglomeration; from here, the interconnecting web of public transportation reaches south all the way to Bethel Island, Pescadero, Salinas, Big Sur. But northward, towns are few, redwoods are king and buses are nil. And so for the third and last time we boarded the trusty Greyhound.

The coach squeezed through the redwoods, past kitschy Confusion Hill (long-lost cousin of the Santa Cruz Mystery Spot), through Benbow, where entire families drifted dreamily down the Eel River on inner tubes, and so on up to flyspeck Rio Dell. ("Are you sure you want to get off here?" the

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Elk near hiking trail between Orick and Klamath

first and foremost as an American — or as a Jew?" "Do you feel more comfortable being described as a woman — or as a lawyer?" We — before we think of ourselves as Americans or as Californians or writers — think of ourselves as residents of the BART service area.

On a whim, we hopped off at Hayward for a quick, satisfying thrift-store jaunt (one of life's pleasures for us). Welcome home, we told each other.

Hayward to Berkeley

Distance 19 miles Mode BART Price \$1.65 each

There's an almost-home feeling that you somehow forget about through all the other phases of a vacation, and it started now: a heavy, sort of swollen feeling — as if you're a bee lumbering back to its hive laden with pollen.

While you were gone you managed to forget completely about most of your possessions. Living out of a knapsack, fooling yourself that all you have in the world is that knapsack, you feel so virtuous and ascetic. But nearing home you remember your closets full of clothes, your heavy furniture, boxes and cupboards full of things, and each item suddenly becomes a trap, a weight around your ankles, threatening to shackle you to home and never let you wander free again.

On Durant Avenue, dazed youths drifted and hovered among unsteady piles of stereo equipment and tennis rackets. It was move-into-the-dorms-day at UC Berkeley. Parents squawked orders from Volvos and Hondas double- and triple-parked along Durant. We crossed war-zone Telegraph — where most of the windows were still boarded up from recent People's Park riots — and at College Avenue, the bus driver lost her marbles. "Goddamn!" she roared, gesturing toward the Volvos. "What kind of goddamn place is that to park? I can't believe this! Goddamn!"

We ground slowly down too-narrow College, which became wide Broadway, through desolate Sunday-morning downtown Oakland, to the ferry terminal at the waterfront.

Oakland Waterfront to S.F. Pier 39

Distance 8 miles Mode Blue and Gold Fleet "Oski Ferry" Price \$3.50 each

It was kids-ride-for-free day at the ferry terminal, and all the little sailors were dashing happily about in the fog.

Oakland Harbor was grand but lonesome. A Navy hospital ship loomed huge and white, but everyone's eyes were trained westward, where the Bay Bridge and the Golden Gate and Alcatraz were lined up, framing



CALIFORNIA

Continued From Previous Page

driver queried.) We had heard that from here it was possible — difficult, but possible — to reach, unaided, the Oregon border.

Rio Dell to Scotia

Distance 1 mile Mode Walk Price Free

When we had written to the Rio Dell Chamber of Commerce asking for bus information, it responded by sending us a plastic car garbage bag imprinted with the slogan "Rio Dell — Warm-Hearted City." Now, in the chilly dusk, the Chamber of Commerce was shut up tight, as was everything else. A round-faced boy on a Schwinn suggested we walk to Scotia.

Rio Dell, though surrounded by forest, is brutish and seedy, the evil twin of uptight, proper, adjacent Scotia. Yapping dogs lunged at us, straining at their chains. Front yards were litter-strewn, windows were cracked and rusty mufflers lay about in piles. A car screeched to a halt in front of us, and a woman leaped out, howling at a mustachioed man who was crossing the street. "Carl, I'm gonna kill you! You piece of s---! You're dead!" He fled and she tore off after him. A toddler sat alone in the front seat of the idling car, playing with a plastic boat.

Fifteen minutes later we were in Scotia, one of the few remaining company towns in California. Pacific Lumber owns the entire city — mills, businesses and orderly rows of freshly painted employee bungalows. Scotia's architectural highlight is a mock Roman temple with untrimmed redwood logs in place of columns.

Scotia to Arcata

Distance 33 miles Mode Redwood Transit Authority Price \$1.25 each

The bus showed up exactly as the bicycle boy had predicted. The gravelly voiced driver explained that the mill workers stayed in Scotia to earn a living and sleep, and went to Rio Dell to get drunk and fight. "You gotta watch out in Rio Dell," she growled.

By the time we reached Arcata, night had fallen.

End of ninth day

Arcata to McKinleyville

Distance 5 miles Mode Redwood Transit Authority Price \$1.25 each

McKinleyville is an apple-pie-Fourth-of-July kind of town, misplaced by the cosmic mapmaker from central Iowa to Northern California. We spent an hour in a frilly coffee shop drinking 35-cent cups of cocoa and nibbling huge fruity muffins that cost one-fourth what they would have in Berkeley. The shop's warm but weary cake decorator was proud of his work. He could do Garfield, a baseball diamond or a very realistic clown. He pointed out a towering wooden pole across the parking lot. "Tallest totem pole in the world," he sighed, as if tired of repeating the statistic.

McKinleyville to Trinidad

Distance 8 miles Mode Redwood Transit Authority Price Free with transfer

Imagining that we could discern the trailhead, we plunged up an overgrown hillside and spent the next hour scaling a sheer rockbound cliff and then beating our way through an impenetrable thicket composed entirely of brambles and nettles. We knew at this point that we were the stupidest, most misguided, quixotic fools in the world.

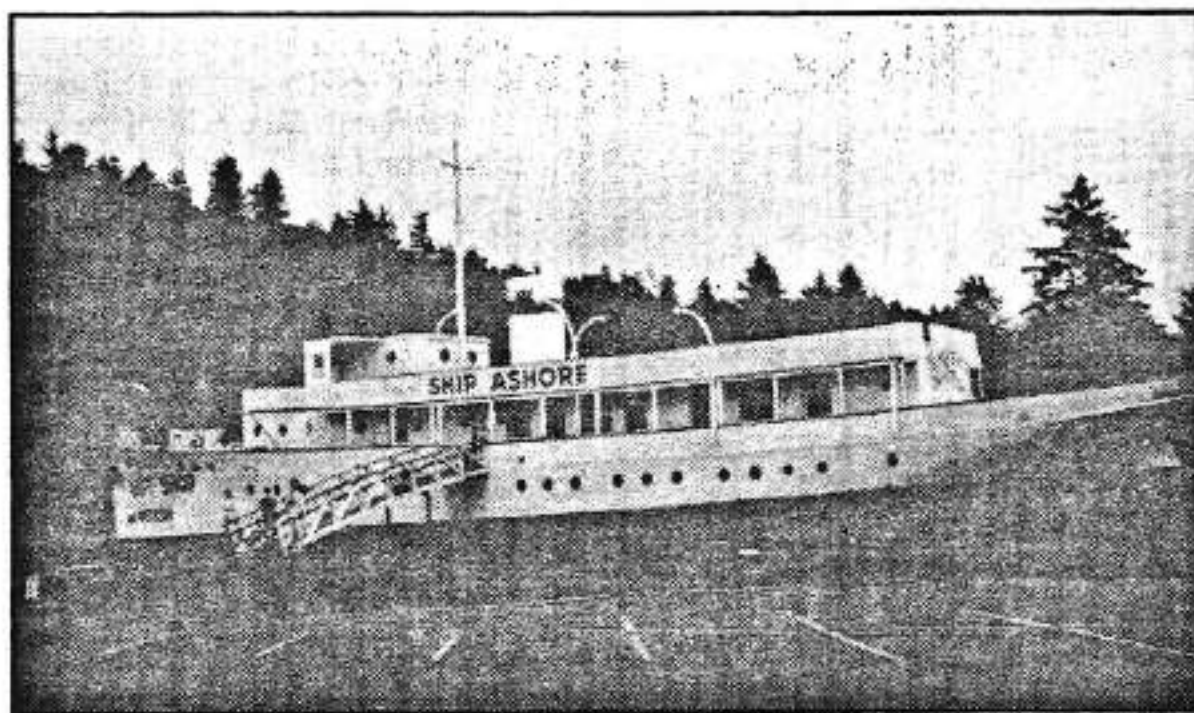
In Trinidad, Hoopa Indians drove by in Ford Fairlanes. From the headland, we could hear sea lions' relentless barking. Some fishermen were having a ling cod derby at the pier, pools of oily blood lay all about.

No one in town had the vaguest idea where the bus stop might be, so we guessed, and stood under what could have been a bus shelter. But the bus — a small van, in fact — stopped a block away, and we trotted toward it

might be 23 miles. The hike was unavoidable, as no buses connect Orick to Klamath.

We started out strong and stalwart. (Redwoods inspire bravado.) From the highway just north of Orick, a trail cuts across a ribbon of forest and opens onto Gold Bluffs Beach. A beaten path runs along the top of the beach, at the foot of fawn-colored cliffs.

Forgive our insouciance when we say that the first seven or eight miles



Just south of the Oregon border

as the driver gestured frantically, revving his engine, yelling out the window that he was late and couldn't wait. He roared off the moment the door slammed behind us.

Trinidad to Orick

Distance 20 miles Mode Trinidad-Orick Public Bus Price \$1 each

Where better than the cold soaring purity of the redwoods to hear, on the radio, about a haywire Soviet coup and the end of the world as we knew it? The van driver, a squinting North Coast radical, was livid. "What's goin' on here?" he thundered as the news broke, beating the steering wheel with a square, calloused hand. He fiddled with the dial, but even the soothing voices and confident trumpet trills of National Public Radio did not comfort him. He glowered down his red nose at the radio. "What the hell are they tryin' to pull? You can't trust anybody."

End of 10th day

Orick to Klamath

Distance 23 miles Mode Walk Price Free

Back home, dedicated hikers had assured us that *no one* is foolhardy enough to tackle 20 miles in a single day.

So off we went in the morning. It might, we reasoned, be only 18 miles. The map wasn't 100 percent clear about where the beach ended and the trail that led back to the road, and to Klamath, began. So then again, it

were no problem. At 12 miles we insisted we could go no farther, ever, but then there was a waterfall, and that gave us the strength to continue. At 14 miles we were ready to die, but then we came upon a herd of 30 elk, browsing leisurely alongside the trail. At 16 miles it was a matter of one-foot-in-front-of-the-other-and-don't-think-of-anything-else, but we saw an offshore islet completely covered with yelping sea lions. Things like that change your life; they are benedictions, and at 16 miles you need benedictions.

At 20 miles, a jutting headland cut off the beach. Imagining that we could discern the trailhead, we plunged up an overgrown hillside and spent the next hour scaling a sheer rockbound cliff and then (the trail had been imaginary) beating our way through an impenetrable thicket composed entirely of brambles and nettles. We knew at this point that we were the stupidest, most misguided, quixotic fools in the world. One of us was not speaking to the other. A road finally appeared where none had been before, and it was another handful of miles — who's counting? — into Klamath, where all the cozy cafes were shutting down for the night and would not serve us so much as a box of Trix. But we had seen elk!

End of 11th day

Klamath to Crescent City

Distance 20 miles Mode Del Norte County Public Bus Price \$1 each

We were nettle-stung and starving. The bus was smooth and efficient and full of passengers who chatted eagerly about their errands. The driver called out, "Anyone know if Viv is gonna be ridin' today?" There was a prolonged discussion, at the end of which it was decided that we should just drive by her house and find out. We hurtled down a country road — a battered car, freshly crashed, lay belly-up in a ditch and we all gasped — then up a gravelly driveway to a wood-frame bungalow. The driver got out — can you imagine this happening on the No. 22 Fillmore? — and rapped on the screen door. "Viv? You comin' with us today?" A red-cheeked woman came out. "I've got the grandkids today. Won't be ridin'. Thanky!"

So the bus driver, whistling, hopped back in behind the wheel and roared merrily down the highway, big trees looming like giants above us. "I've been reading about this Russian coop," said a woman in a crocheted hat.

Crescent City to Ship Ashore

Distance 16 miles Mode Del Norte County Public Bus Price \$1 each

We were, once again, the only passengers. Out of town we went into a sprawling checkerboard of rural roads and spiky Easter lily plantations. The sea lurked just a few yards away, but the fog hung down over it as if to deliberately keep it hidden. The bus dropped us off at Ship Ashore, a 160-foot former government yacht now marooned in a vast parking lot and forced to be a tacky gift shop.

The end of the line was within reach. We'd have to walk the rest of the way to Oregon, and the experiment would end there, for Oregon, like most of the West, has no public transportation linking cities.

Riding all alone had felt good in a way, like having a secret. But at the same time it was worrisome. If some transportation official were to find out, he might think this route through the fresh dewy flatness was unnecessary, and the Crescent City-Ship Ashore run would be canceled forever, like L.A.'s Red Cars or Berkeley's Key System. Here's our nightmare: What if they offered a cheap, safe, convenient transportation service — and nobody came?

Ship Ashore to Oregon Border

Distance 2 miles Mode Walk Price Free

So that was it. California, as seen through the rattling, spit-streaked windows of buses. We set off toward the border, humming. We were, in all, \$211.50 poorer, not counting food and lodging, which seemed a tiny price to pay for two weeks of palm trees, beaches, burritos, log cabins, picnics and sea lions. Buses are America's humble, uncomplaining, subsidized beasts of burden. They get under your skin — like ringworm.

And then we stopped preaching and walked the two miles to Oregon.

End of 12th day

Total Mileage

Distance 1,069 miles Transportation Expenses \$58.65 each for city buses and trains and \$47.10 each for Greyhound Total Transportation Expenses \$105.75 each

