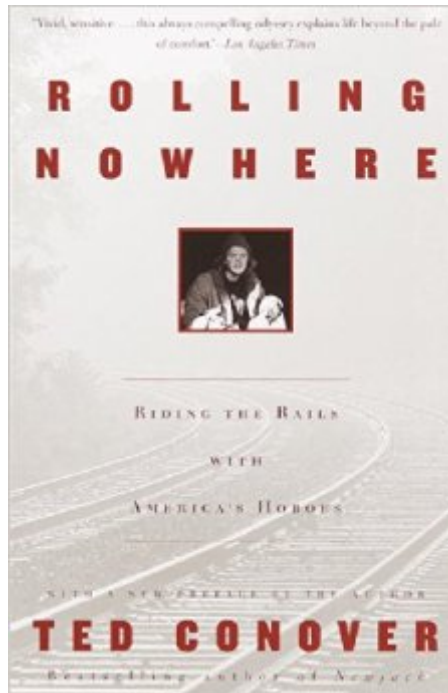


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Rolling Nowhere: Riding The Rails With America's Hoboes



Synopsis

In Ted Conover's first book, now back in print, he enters a segment of humanity outside society and reports back on a world few of us would choose to enter but about which we are all curious. Hoboes fascinated Conover, but he had only encountered them in literature and folksongs. So, he decided to take a year off and ride the rails. Equipped with rummage-store clothing, a bedroll, and a few other belongings, he hops a freight train in St. Louis, becoming a tramp in order to discover their peculiar culture. The men and women he meets along the way are by turns generous and mistrusting, resourceful and desperate, philosophical and profoundly cynical. And the narrative he creates of his travels with them is unforgettable and moving.

Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Vintage (September 11, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375727868

ISBN-13: 978-0375727863

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.6 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (47 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #606,327 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #113 in [Books > Travel > Food, Lodging & Transportation > Railroad Travel](#) #331 in [Books > Engineering & Transportation > Transportation > Railroads](#) #608 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Poverty](#)

Customer Reviews

You've got to give Conover credit, the kid has guts. Discontent with his college studies, which seem a bit unreal and removed from real life, he decides to do some hands on research and give the life of a hobo a try. Predictably, things are not what he expects. The life of a hobo (more accurately known as a tramp) is far from romantic and most often full of hardship and danger. However, Conover also discovers a world of fascinating folks who, when push comes to shove, are not so different from the rest of us. There is Lonny, the eternal optimist whose head is full of dreams that never materialize, Pistol Pete with his injured hand and jealous sidekick BB who propose a 3-musketeers deal and then run off with most of his gear, Forrest and Bill with whom he discovers the depths of being a tramp, and Monty who is pursued by personal ghosts. Equally important to

Conover's education is his personal transformation from a well-dressed, polite city kid to a rail smart tramp who won't let anyone take advantage of him. His hair grows, his clothes become dirty, layered and ragged, he learns to smoke and drink cheap booze, to scavenge in dumpsters for leftover food and how to apply for food stamps. Even more revealing to him is how he is treated as his physical appearance changes. Suddenly people look away, a policeman finds a reason to arrest him for walking on a public sidewalk and he is treated with mistrust and even disgust when he goes into stores. Conover emerges from his adventures with a bad case of head lice but nothing worse physically. However, it is clear that his inner psyche has undergone a transformation. He has questioned the assumptions of his middle class upbringing and dared to immerse himself in the lives of one of our country's most misunderstood groups.

While growing up, author Ted Conover was fascinated by the hobo lifestyle which represented freedom, independence and adventure. So, in 1980, he took time off from studies at Amherst to play hobo and ride the rails through the western states, ostensibly gathering material for a senior anthropology thesis. Hopping a freight in St. Louis, he went by stages to Denver, Salt Lake City, Pocatello (Idaho), Havre (Montana), Fargo (North Dakota), Spokane, Seattle, Portland, Eugene (Oregon), Oroville (California), Elko (Nevada), Oakland, Bakersfield (California), Los Angeles, Yuma, El Paso, and back to Denver. Along the way, he meets and loosely befriends those that wander from one place to the next in search of food stamps, discarded edibles and a safe place to sleep - an autonomy and liberty gained at the sacrifice of loved ones, comfort, security, and the income from a steady 9 to 5. The most interesting was 50-year old Sheba, the rare female tramp, who'd built herself a multi-room shelter out of old tires. Conover is a talented writer who deftly captures the "romance" of the rails in *ROLLING NOWHERE*. About the scenery from a boxcar: "A twisting chasm of waterfalls, spillways, gray rock, and isolated scrub trees hanging on to the canyon walls for dear life, the Feather River Canyon was inaccessible by car, but ... spectacular by freight train." About the grunge: "Forrest ... scratched his scalp vigorously and pulled out a small something. He flicked it away with distaste toward the other side of the tree where I slept." About the food: "I ... shared ravenously in the fare: a bottle of cold white port, a small, dirty Baggie of lettuce, and two brown bananas." But hey, the chow isn't all bad.

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