

Little Pilgrim's Progress



Surviving Michigan's untamed, wild Upper Peninsula without passport money or a credit card.

By Kristian Kahrs

Being an experienced Norwegian backpacker does not help you if you have no backpack. You have to improvise and make the best out of the situation. I and two of my Norwegian friends were going to Canada for a holiday. The problems started in the little town of Rheinlander, WI. For those of you who are not familiar with Rheinlander, this is a tiny little town in the Middle of Nowhere, on Highway 8 between the Twin Cities and Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. That was where the problems started. Not because of Rheinlander or my backpack, but because of me.

First travel tip: Do not forget your backpack in the Middle of Nowhere. Especially if you have your passport, money, and credit card in it.

Yes, that was what I did. I have never done anything like that again. The loss of the backpack was not discovered before we came to St. Ignanz, Michigan. Then we had two choices: Either we could drive four hours back to Rheinlander or we could try to cross the border to Canada without a passport. Unfortunately we decided to go for the second suggestion. I never came to Canada that Thanksgiving.

Second travel tip: If you are a Norwegian, there is no point in trying to cross the border into Canada without a passport.

On the US side of the Soo I'm stuck for four days in a motel, waiting for the backpack to come up with UPS from the Amoco station in Rheinlander. After four days in a motel, you become an authority on the HBO's more or less entertaining movies. But more important: Did I ever get my backpack? Of course not. Those poor souls at the gas station in the Middle of Nowhere had sent my backpack back to St. Paul! My friends didn't care to wait for me. They had left for the Canadian forests. So, what do you do if you neither has your passport, nor money, nor student visa, nor credit card? You hitchhike.

I stuck my thumb out, waited for the first car. I was lucky. A car stopped after half an hour. Then I was not so lucky. On Interstate 75 outside Sault Ste. Marie there are five federal prisons and big signs saying: **"Prison area! Do NOT pick up hitch-hikers"**

"Well," the old, hearing impaired man who picked me up said. "This is how far I'm going." Unshaven, dirty, and with a plastic bag over my head as protection against the combined rain and snow, I waited for the next ride.

Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.

Praying and hoping that some soul will have mercy with you is all you can do if you are dropped off in a prison area. Amazingly a car stopped after twenty minutes.

Third travel tip: If you're ever dropped off in a prison zone, trust God.

There are many good citizens in the United States. They gave money to a poor, hitchhiking Norwegian, a victim of his own stupidity. Three people gave me fifteen, twenty, and forty dollars. One of them I can never repay. Another offered housing for the night if I were not picked up.

Finally, I sat in a truck headed for Minneapolis, telling the driver that I didn't have any money, but he could get my story. That is before I saw the red lights and the sirens. Two Michigan State Troopers stopped in front of the truck. Police officers do not like dirty Norwegians hitchhiking on their highway. With the flashlight shining in my face, I had to go out of the truck. "Place your hands on the hood, and spread your legs," said the female State Trooper who frisked me for any secret weapons. (Though, I am a little guy, and I could not hurt a flea if I wanted to.) I had some experiences from the back seat of a police car for an hour. The State Troopers wanted to arrange a bus ride and have the Salvation Army pay for the ticket. If so I would have to wait ten hours, and I would only come to Duluth. That is nothing for a genuine backpacker who has been

around Europe several times. So, I told them: "Please put me off. I will continue hitchhiking."

Fourth travel tip: If a State Trooper picks you up, tell them your story.

A little Suzuki jeep stopped in the middle of the night. Inside was a retired local police officer. He drank beer. The man could not be more than forty. And he is no longer a police officer . . . It's obvious that the man doesn't feel good about his drinking, and we had a conversation about the dangers about DWI. Nobody was killed, neither humans nor deer, and we arrived Norway (on this side of the Atlantic, actually in Michigan) a little nice town with 3000 people. It was only 18 degrees, and I was jumping up and down; I only had tennis shoes, and no warm clothes. The local cops gave me real black coffee, and listened to my story. After three hours in the night the nice manager woman and her employee Rupert in the Ea-Zy Stop gas station had mercy on me. The nice manager wanted to get me back home, despite the cost. At eight in the morning she screamed out: "Anyone going to Minneapolis? This poor little guy needs a ride." Thank you Mrs. Manager. You're truly a good American. Not only was there a man going to Minneapolis; he was going to my suburb, Roseville!

The aftermath: A week after I came home there was a letter in my mailbox.. Inside there were thirty dollars and a letter saying: "I've heard about you unfortunate experiences in the break. I hope this will make you feel better. A friend." It's really good to be Norwegian in America.