

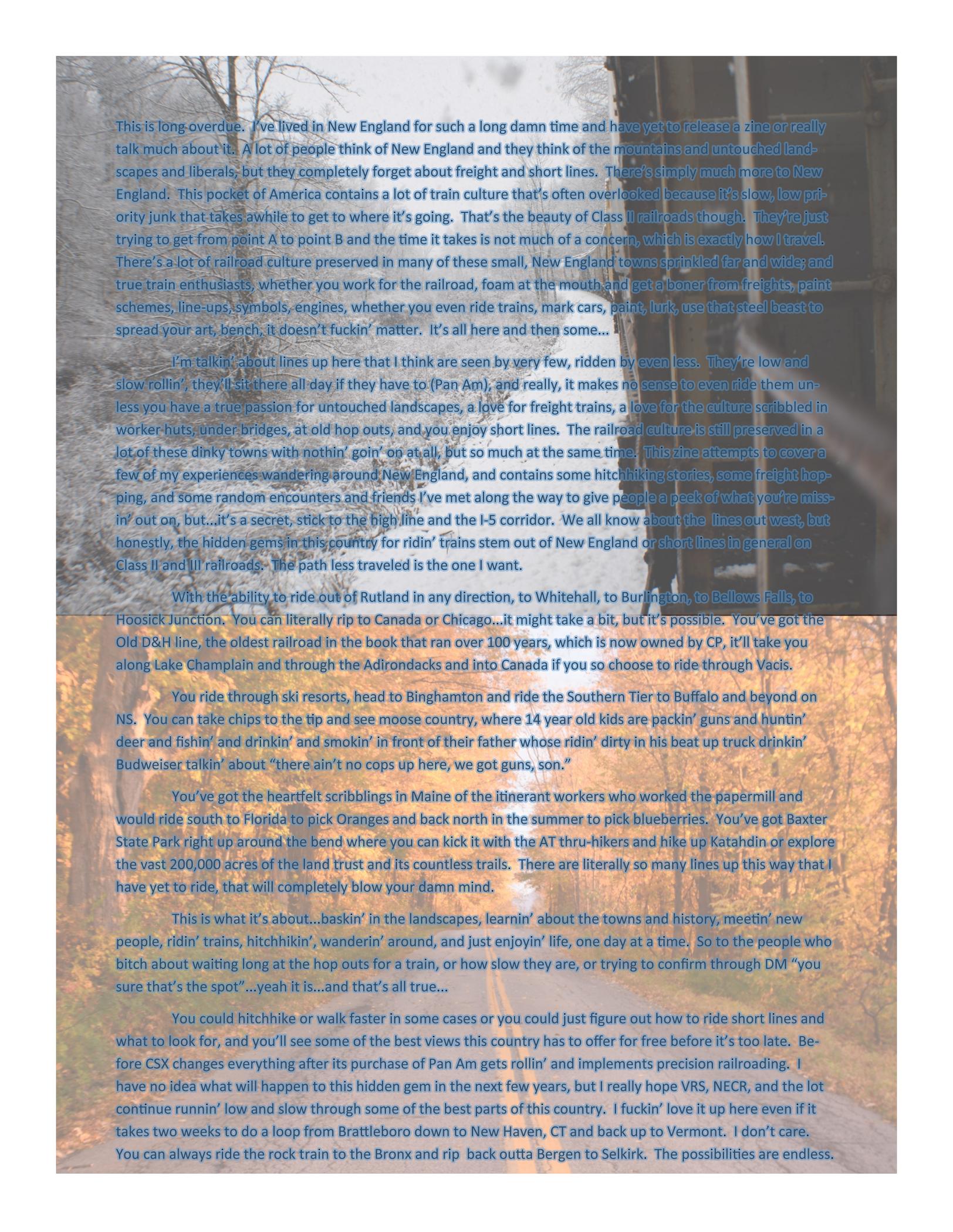


A central graphic with a blue, textured background. At the top left, there is a circular logo with 'CRAV' and 'ST. ALBANS' below it. To its right, the text 'IT'S ALL A FUGAZ 7/18' is written. Further right, the word 'ZEE' is written in a large, blocky, outlined font. Below these elements, the text 'SLOW FREIGHT THE' is written in a similar blocky font, and at the bottom, 'MAINE VEIN' is written in the same style.



21 OLD WELRD'S
DAMENTID MIXTAPE! EDIE'S



A background image showing a train in a snowy, wooded area. The train is partially visible on the right side, and the trees are covered in snow. The overall scene is quiet and somewhat desolate.

This is long overdue. I've lived in New England for such a long damn time and have yet to release a zine or really talk much about it. A lot of people think of New England and they think of the mountains and untouched landscapes and liberals, but they completely forget about freight and short lines. There's simply much more to New England. This pocket of America contains a lot of train culture that's often overlooked because it's slow, low priority junk that takes awhile to get to where it's going. That's the beauty of Class II railroads though. They're just trying to get from point A to point B and the time it takes is not much of a concern, which is exactly how I travel. There's a lot of railroad culture preserved in many of these small, New England towns sprinkled far and wide; and true train enthusiasts, whether you work for the railroad, foam at the mouth and get a boner from freights, paint schemes, line-ups, symbols, engines, whether you even ride trains, mark cars, paint, lurk, use that steel beast to spread your art, bench, it doesn't fuckin' matter. It's all here and then some...

I'm talkin' about lines up here that I think are seen by very few, ridden by even less. They're low and slow rollin', they'll sit there all day if they have to (Pan Am), and really, it makes no sense to even ride them unless you have a true passion for untouched landscapes, a love for freight trains, a love for the culture scribbled in worker huts, under bridges, at old hop outs, and you enjoy short lines. The railroad culture is still preserved in a lot of these dinky towns with nothin' goin' on at all, but so much at the same time. This zine attempts to cover a few of my experiences wandering around New England, and contains some hitchhiking stories, some freight hopping, and some random encounters and friends I've met along the way to give people a peek of what you're missin' out on, but...it's a secret, stick to the high line and the I-5 corridor. We all know about the lines out west, but honestly, the hidden gems in this country for ridin' trains stem out of New England or short lines in general on Class II and III railroads. The path less traveled is the one I want.

With the ability to ride out of Rutland in any direction, to Whitehall, to Burlington, to Bellows Falls, to Hoosick Junction. You can literally rip to Canada or Chicago...it might take a bit, but it's possible. You've got the Old D&H line, the oldest railroad in the book that ran over 100 years, which is now owned by CP, it'll take you along Lake Champlain and through the Adirondacks and into Canada if you so choose to ride through Vacis.

You ride through ski resorts, head to Binghamton and ride the Southern Tier to Buffalo and beyond on NS. You can take chips to the tip and see moose country, where 14 year old kids are packin' guns and huntin' deer and fishin' and drinkin' and smokin' in front of their father whose ridin' dirty in his beat up truck drinkin' Budweiser talkin' about "there ain't no cops up here, we got guns, son."

You've got the heartfelt scribblings in Maine of the itinerant workers who worked the papermill and would ride south to Florida to pick Oranges and back north in the summer to pick blueberries. You've got Baxter State Park right up around the bend where you can kick it with the AT thru-hikers and hike up Katahdin or explore the vast 200,000 acres of the land trust and its countless trails. There are literally so many lines up this way that I have yet to ride, that will completely blow your damn mind.

This is what it's about...baskin' in the landscapes, learnin' about the towns and history, meetin' new people, ridin' trains, hitchhikin', wanderin' around, and just enjoyin' life, one day at a time. So to the people who bitch about waiting long at the hop outs for a train, or how slow they are, or trying to confirm through DM "you sure that's the spot" ...yeah it is...and that's all true...

You could hitchhike or walk faster in some cases or you could just figure out how to ride short lines and what to look for, and you'll see some of the best views this country has to offer for free before it's too late. Before CSX changes everything after its purchase of Pan Am gets rollin' and implements precision railroading. I have no idea what will happen to this hidden gem in the next few years, but I really hope VRS, NECR, and the lot continue runnin' low and slow through some of the best parts of this country. I fuckin' love it up here even if it takes two weeks to do a loop from Brattleboro down to New Haven, CT and back up to Vermont. I don't care. You can always ride the rock train to the Bronx and rip back outta Bergen to Selkirk. The possibilities are endless.

I have yet to do the rock train, but it's on the list...



This zine cannot possibly cover all of New England, but I'm gonna do my best to focus "mainly" on Maine and some of my experiences there with blurbs and pictures of Vermont and other parts of the northeast scattered throughout. It's a beautiful area of America that is often overlooked.



W)A I S / T
OF
L I F E

SLOW AND SCENIC ON LOADED WOOD CHIPS

THE
12/18
CHRISTMAS
DAY

After lying my ass off to the Park Ranger at Baxter State Park, I found myself with a pink warning slip in my pocket, my pack in the bed of his vehicle and my ass plopped in his passenger's seat. He lived in Maine his whole life, worked at the park for 12 years and offered me a job as a gatekeeper attendant. He set his truck in park outside of the Family Dollar and pointed across the street at the headquarters.

"See that buildin', wit the white sign, pass the McDonal's?"

"Yeah"

"That's the headquarters...get a job application there...we're hirin'."

"Alright...cool. Thanks man I definitely will."

As soon as I hopped out of his vehicle I trotted across the street, indulging in a victory McDonalds meal before setting off to fill out the application. The whole document took a half hour to complete, with all my jobs, employment gaps, addresses, phone numbers and remembering the names of every manager, it felt tedious and futile at the same time. Only because after letting my feet breathe from my boots, cleaning up the sores and blisters between my smelly toes, I knew I could not sit still long enough to hear from them. Instead, enduring each uncomfortable stride and wrenching jolt of pain, stifling my tramp to a miserably slow pace, I walked alone into the dusk, rambling through quiet neighborhoods to the end of Katahdin Avenue by the train tracks.

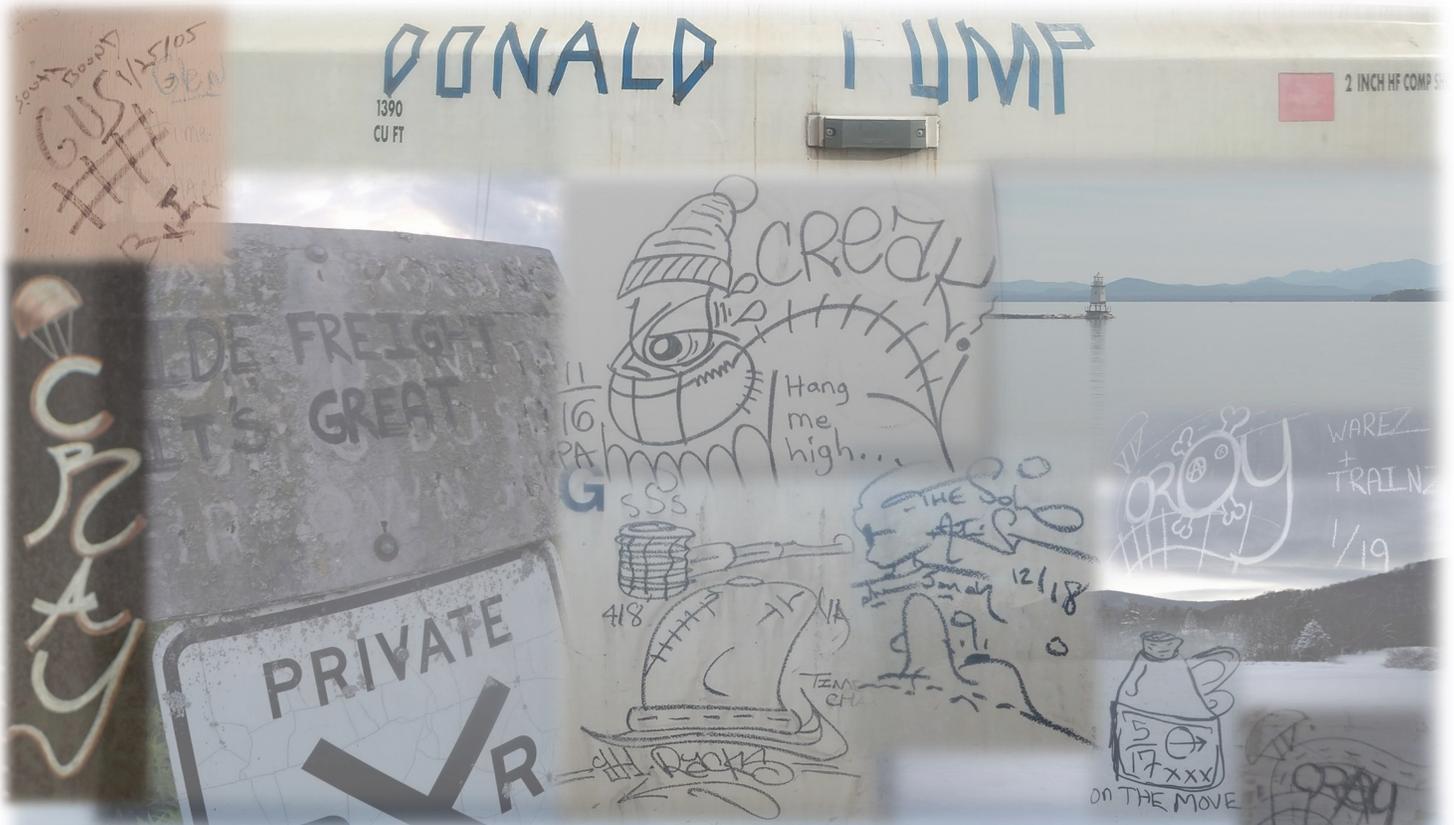
Engines revved across from the river as kids sped down the gravel roadway on their ATVs, spitting up rocks and dust clouds among their chatter and cheers. I stood, hiding in the boscage by the banks of river, between poison ivy, vines and towering oaks, a canvass of green, waiting for the crowd to pitter off with the onset of ebony sky.

As the sky fell and opened up to myriad stars, speckling night like a neon paint splatter, with a swirl of the Milky Way, the commotion died. The kids left. The only sound that remained was that of nature.

The river lay, so calm, so clear, rippling peacefully. With the subtlest of breezes, the buzzing of mosquitoes tapered off. I sprawled out by the gravelly banks looking up at the yellow fireworks of sky cast out beyond the silhouette of train bridge, closing my eyes for the purest night's rest.

Her body clanked along the steel and I scurried under the train bridge that morning hearing her loud shriek of metal, the jarring of freight cars and her stoppage on the main line. I felt at ease. The sensation and passion pittered back to me in those moments of future unknown freedom. Where would her wheels roll to I did not know?

I scuttled up the ballast, slipping backwards up the steep slant of hill until I reached the plateau, drifting across the mouth of the yard. I wandered her line of freight cars towards her rear, reaching her tallest gondola and gripped her rungs of simmering steel, heated from the flaming torch of sky on that cloudless day. My innocence long left me years ago and I no longer felt the rush of hopping freight, but merely embraced her oasis



of beauty, America's hidden gem. I climbed to the top. I jumped in and tucked away in her corner on loaded wood chips, dodging the sun in a sliver of shadow as I leaned against her brisk steel wall, waiting for the soft simmer of air and rumble of her wheels.

Not long after, her hoses hissed. Her wheels creaked. Her cars clanked. Her wood chips grumbled. She slowly inched, stewing forward, and churning side-to-side as she drifted into miles and miles of Maine wilderness, stunning and untouched as far as man could see.

I felt on top of the world, standing there atop a puzzle of wood chippings, the breeze floundering my hair about as the views rolled in slowly and steadily. She rode at a whimpering creak, slower than riding loaded coal from Denver to Amarillo, slower than riding the Pan American from Portland to Bangor, slower than any damn junk train I ever hopped. My eyes captured the picturesque beauty of the landscape creeping by and never let go of its majesty. The vibrant colors of earth just kept rolling by like a surreal film.

My eyes wandered. Freight cars of wood chips became a mosaic of rumbling stomachs pulsating under rattling steel, wanting to explode! I watched the line of loaded gondolas, in front of me, clank about the steel, shimmying side-to-side like the unsettling motion of a ship at sea. Dark green coniferous forest draped its branches towards the tracks, and the smell of pine and cedar wood chips endlessly flowed throughout the air for miles.

She putted along at unbearably slow, but scenic speeds, meandering the maze of steel through the wilderness of Northern Maine. Outside Millinocket, the virgin land between the small quaint cities of Brownville, Mattawamkeag and Danforth, thrived with priceless views only seen by train. She gifted me that ultimate solitude. Never in my life have I felt such freedom, such at ease, such extraordinary scenery, rolling by at just a "creak" through blazes of lime green grass, through shimmering wetlands with the deepest navy blue lagoons, through the calm cerulean lakes and rivers, from a rooftop paradise. I sat on top of the world, on loaded wood chips, with the biggest grin and keenest eyes, sifting through unknown territory, with no phone, no direction, and no timeline, riding blind into the sunset.

The best part about when I do a zine is there are no restrictions, no editor, no publisher, no one chirping in my ear that the content I'm producing needs to be altered for the general public. I don't have to go through a team of people to get my work approved because I'm not doing it for money. I can write about anything, about any topic or thought in my mind, and guess what? You took the time to open the pages or scroll down enough on your phone to read this and maybe you get something outta it and it's something to pass the time. That's really the point. A zine is nothing more than a creative way to distribute my work as an artist.

I've already been through the publishing process, and honestly, you just end up selling your heart to the man for pennies to an audience that doesn't even know you or the passion you have for what you do and how you live. Look at bands like Chevelle who've produced over six million albums for Epic records, but have made "no money." Companies only care about maximizing profits at the expense of your labor. Once you get sucked in, they own you, and tell you what to do and what you must create. Your passion slowly bleeds out until there's nothing left, no passion, enjoyment, just the duty to write.

At the time I was introduced to the whole publishing process, the title of being an official "author" gave me an ego boost. When I originally went through with it, I had this idea, this false happiness about finally becoming an author, and maybe one day getting more of my work out there, more short stories, and novellas, and novels published. I thought it was a stepping stone, but then I quickly realized something...

It's nice to get your work out there to the masses for the public to read, but when we're talking about trains, something I hold close to my heart, something I've immersed myself in as much as I possibly can without living on the street, destitute and downtrodden (already been there), it's far more special than money, than fame, than whatever title that might come with it. Who cares? That shit doesn't matter.

People have reached out to tell me I should write a book and get it published. I appreciate those kind words, but I'm already publishing and distributing my work for free through zines, on Instagram, previously on a blog, and maybe someday I'll compile a book myself, but it as long as I'm distributing it, people are reading it, and that's all I really care about anyway.

I'm already a writer. I have been for nine years now and will continue to keep scribbling away, putting my thoughts and emotions down on paper for those to read. Every time someone reaches out by text message, email, DM on Instagram, YouTube (before I took shit down) or in person to talk about my work, well that's enough in my opinion, the appreciation, and a thanks. If you're living your life strictly for money, than you've lost the point of life itself, of passion, of hobbies and why you're doing them to begin with. For me, those months I spent slaving away to get my work published and out there were miserable and regrettable.

Anything I've ever done for money, that initial passion and fire fades rather quickly. It's why I have trouble staying employed for more than three month spurts. Once I no longer need the money, what the hell is the point? I'm not saying you can't make money off what you love doing. No. That would be a pretty asinine statement for me to make. You can't live in the world today without money and liquid assets. It's been proven by Gene Rossellini that we can't go back to the Stone Age in modern times. I'm just saying love what you do and do what you love. If you can manage to break through and become independent of the system, become autonomous, spread your work as an indie creator, then hell yeah! Go that route.

Otherwise expect to live in shackles regardless of how much you're making. There are very few things in life that are free. If you have a skill that you can earn a living off of, that you love and enjoy, then you're doing it right. For me, I love writing and photography, but I'm not doing them for money. Maybe that will change one day. Maybe it won't. It doesn't take away from anything I've created.





Let's talk about Great Northern Paper Company. If you're like me, you probably didn't know that in the 70s and 80s, in its heyday, this manufacturer produced 16.4% of newsprint manufactured in the United States. Before they closed their doors in the 90s, they had operations running in Arkansas, Georgia, Wisconsin and that's right folks, MAINE! How does this tie into trains and the railroad? Well, back when the company was in operation the freight running in and out of Millinocket was booming. It was enough for riders to bitch about the bull being a dickhead from pencil scribbles I read in the worker shack by the yard. Think about that. A bull roaming the yard in New England for a Class II railroad. It just blows my mind.

This wasn't just any run of the mill, Mill. When Great Northern Paper Company opened in 1897 it was the largest paper mill in the world. That's right. The largest paper mill in the world came out of dinky Millinocket, Maine producing 240 tons/day of newsprint. That's 480,000 pounds of paper a day. Think about all the deforestation and trees harmed from this operation. But that's not all the mill manufactured. They also produced 120 tons/day of sulfite pulp and 240 tons/day of groundwood pulp.

Facilities expanded in 1906 and 1907 to have additional mills in Madison and East Millinocket, Maine. They built dams and power plants and had hydroelectric facilities and their innovations led to the coining of *Great Northern Grinders*, a pulpwood grinding machine used at the mills. They generated high-pressure steam from burning waste bark through the turbines in the dams, which by 1958 generated 200,000 horsepower to the mill. They then used the low-pressure steam to dry the paper for distribution, which they sold to at least 250 newspapers east of the Mississippi River.

If you've ever looked into hiking the Appalachian Trail, then you know about Mount Katahdin, you know about the intense scramble up boulders to get to the top and you know that this trail finalizes the 2,190 mile thru-hike that people revel in when cresting her peak for an immaculate view of Maine. If you've never been, I highly recommend it, but be prepared for it to kick your ass and if you're not in decent shape, don't even bother. If you've enjoyed the steep hike with marveling views and the other trails located in Baxter State Park then you can thank Great Northern Paper Company because in 1930 they sold, but in my opinion, pretty much gifted 6,000 acres of land around the highest point in Maine (Mount Katahdin) to Percival Proctor Baxter, who was the governor of Maine at the time. The land was sold at a whopping \$25,000 and in turn, Baxter, being the altruist that he was, donated all of the land to the state of Maine, which is now Baxter State Park.

The park was established as a trust from 28 donations of land over the span of a 31 year period expanding its land mass from 6,000 to over 200,000 acres. So if you're ever trying to stealth camp and you're wondering why their kind staff will let you hitch a ride with them to the front gate, it's not because they're being nice, it's because they want to make sure you registered at the front office and paid to sleep in the park. The park has allocated a set amount of money each year to keep its doors open and running smoothly putting it on a strict budget. In down years, they take substantial losses as seen in their significant decrease in visitors back in 2005.

I've freedom camped in National Parks, State Parks, and pretty much everywhere in the US, Canada, SEA, and NZ and I gotta say, they are pretty fuckin' serious about not paying as seen in the story I wrote above. Just keep it in mind if you end up here for whatever reason and choose not to go the campground route or like me, camp in the campground without paying haha. Also, keep in mind there are many other trails in the 200,000 acres, don't settle for just Katahdin if you have time to kill. Talk to the staff and ask about remote hiking locations or hikes off the beaten path. I have yet to hike anything in Baxter outside of Katahdin, but if I had gone up there with a vehicle there are a plethora of trails with better views than Katahdin because you get to see this behemoth of a mountain from a short distance away. You'll get to see



pristine lakes, you may even see a black bear, a coyote or two, or if you're lucky a moose.

Great Northern Paper Company merged with multiple companies in the 60s and 70s expanding its operations to Georgia, Arkansas and Mississippi.

The company constructed the Golden Road, a 97-mile stretch of roadway. Despite the costs associated with road maintenance reaching \$6.8 million/year, the company claimed to save much money in the long run compared to floating logs down the river. This process was much slower as shipping timber by means of the river took roughly 18 months and it wasn't uncommon for timber to get lost in the process where as, the Golden Road decreased shipment time to just a few days. Despite it being a private road, the company had no qualms about letting people use it to access the Penobscot River for white water rafting or to sportsmen of all kinds. This is what I love about Maine. Everyone loves the outdoors, hiking, nature and even a huge company like Great Northern Paper Company didn't let red tape get in the way of recreation.

The roadway went along the river allowing shipment operations from Quebec down to the paper mill in Millinocket.

Those days are long gone though now and I would have no idea the paper mill even existed and employed most of the town of Millinocket up until the 90s had it not been for the sentimental scribbles in the worker hut by the train yard. These heartfelt poems and stories and the hardships endured by people who lost years of their lives and pensions to a company that eventually went bankrupt and barely had enough money to pay back its investors at a total of \$40 million is what's wrong with the economic system. The rich always get bailed out and the hard working citizens get the scraps. It's no different right now with what's going on in the country due to Covid. You have these stimulus packages inflating the dollar through unemployment and stimulus checks and most of the money from these bills is going to bail out wallstreet. Any of the money and liquid assets you've saved is now worth much much less. So I can really feel for the workers who became unemployed from this fiasco and walked away with nothing, but memories, nothing but the smell of sawdust and machinery and old hands.



After the hostile takeover in 1989, the company suffered from multiple acquisitions from Georgia-Pacific, Bowater, and Inexcon all with a vested interest in revamping the mill for the potential honey hole that once existed in its prime. But, much like the founding company, none could stay above water without drowning in bankruptcy.

In 2002, Inexcon Holdings declared bankruptcy and the operations continued to change hands shuffling between multiple entities who all suffered the same destiny as the mill continued its decline in 2008, laying off its workers. But, for some reason, this didn't stop companies from seeing that stack of green, that gold mine, that honey hole so the mill kept launching under different corporations and names despite the diminished output in paper production.

In 2008, Cate Street purchased the mill in East Millinocket and what was perceived as a positive light by the townspeople as an alternative to shutting down the mill completely because they hired 250 people at

a time when the area was experiencing insufferable hardship and an unemployment rate of 22%. And I will admit, it looked very promising. With 250 new hires, 3,000 tons of paper output that year, and smiling faces, it looked like the mill got a little pep in its step and no longer needed a cane to walk around. It looked as though it revived from the ashes like a Phoenix, reborn as a new entity, in the same building with a lot of the same employees of the operation, but it was short-lived. That year paper production was up strictly due to the hit trilogy, Fifty Shades of Grey, as this was a three-part novel.

As such, paper production again diminished to virtual zero output and ideas ruminated of tearing down the structures and replacing them to run a torrefaction wood operation, but this never happened. Then in 2014, after 100 years, the paper mill closed its operations for the final time sending notices to workers under the WARN act that they would not be opening again, that the closure was in lamens terms, permanent.

When bankruptcy was filed, Great Northern Paper Company had over 1,000 creditors listed in its filing, which upset many hard-working employees who spent their lives working for this company as they



received little if no compensation for their hard work, no pensions, no benefits, no severance packages. They just lost their job of many years with not much to fall back on other than measly unemployment benefits and having to look for a new career with limited skills and work in the area.

I have been in and out of Millinocket, Maine a few times over the years, from hitchhiking with this hot chick who was slammin' fireball one-shooters and tryin' to get in my pants, to accidentally ending up in Canada in 2018 when I fell asleep and rode wood chips over the border into Canada, to a spontaneous road trip during a snowstorm with Jaybird in his 2-wheel drive vehicle when I thought we were gonna get stuck in the train yard parking lot in Herman, Maine, and most recently, in the summer of 2020 when we rode chips to the tip of Madawaska and saw moose, and guns, and the nicest folks and police officers among pretty views of the Saint John's River and wilderness between. Maine has a special place in my heart, not just Millinocket, but the whole state. You have forts and swimming holes and hiking and artic charr and scenic short lines and a plethora of peninsulas with starry skies and no light pollution where you can sleep on the

a beach looking up at the Milky Way. So basically what I'm saying is get your ass out to Maine, camp, go fishing, hike, explore, check out the train yard and the abandoned steam engines in the woods, befriend a moose. I absolutely love it up here.



To the left is a picture of the bull and what a lot of the old school riders thought of him lol. A lot of the pencil scribblings are hard to read as they were really faded and I didn't get a chance to write down all the funny shit, which I should have, but below are some of the scribblings in the worker hut.

"Red crayon needed...to be continued" (talking about the bull)

"Johnie oh oh, He's our man, send a straight list if you can"

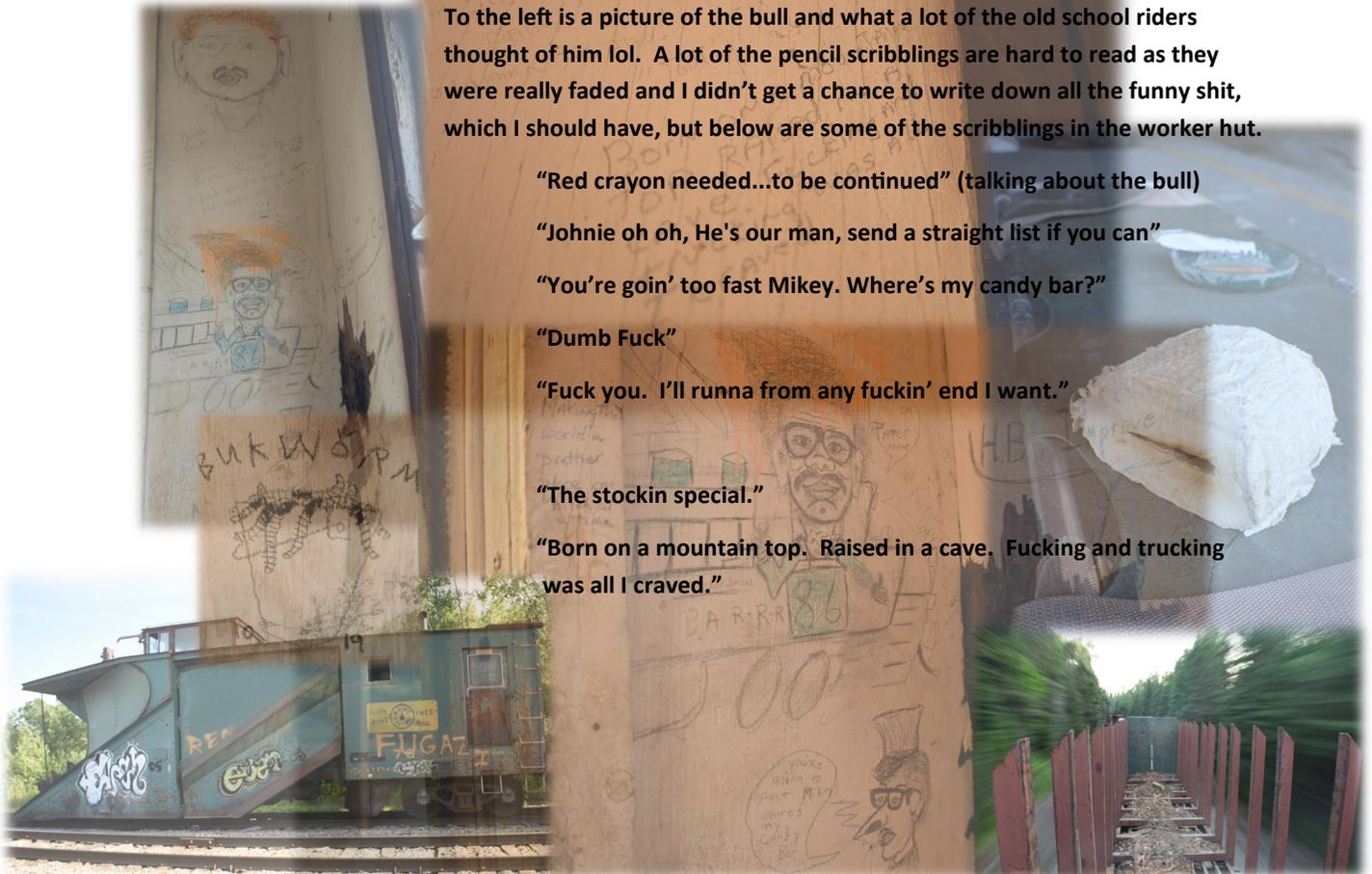
"You're goin' too fast Mikey. Where's my candy bar?"

"Dumb Fuck"

"Fuck you. I'll runna from any fuckin' end I want."

"The stockin special."

"Born on a mountain top. Raised in a cave. Fucking and trucking was all I craved."





CHALKBOARD
BRACKEN
9118

Go to the turning point
they got internet, coffee, toilet
paper, there's a grocie store
and a Beverage store good
for make'n loot too!
Finally got beer and
some suboxone! so
Life is a bit better
"getta cheer up charlie!"
things will get better.
was here 6 years ago,
I hated this place.

Over the Hills,
and through the woods,
Billy Dow's Train does go,
He does know the way
to pull that old sleigh
maybe he'll learn to go slow!

Sick n' tired of
the same old thing.
Wish they'd learn a
new song to sing.
Camping's going down the
drain.
Makes me think I'm going in-
sane.

Dick
Watch out. Old cunthead Harry will
turn you in.

to put up with all the pain.
Just to move a goddamn train.
"Toot"

They can make anything
run...

Glen has more time put into this
shack than Buster does.

If I had a ...I'd call it MC
If I had a penny...I'd call it JC
If I had a Ball...I'd call it Lucy
If I had a cola ...I'd call it RC
If I had a current...I'd call it AC

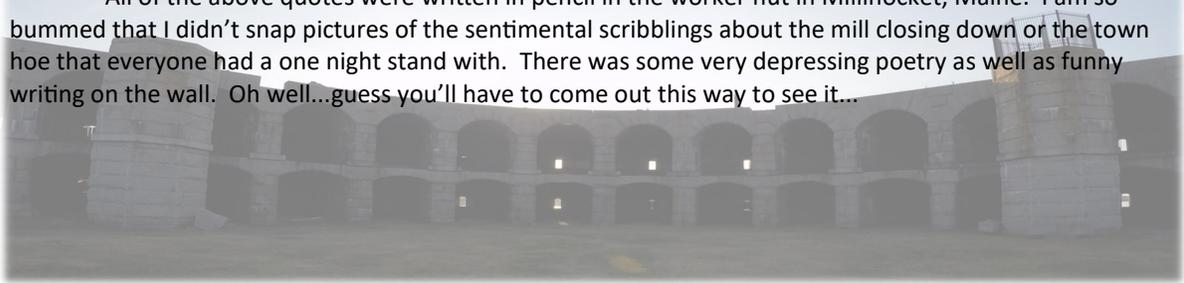
Making the world a pretti-
er place one hitch at a
time.

8-09
SLEIGH
WHERE AM I

If I had another...I'd call it DC
If I had a cunt...I'd call it Juice C
If I had a pipe made...out of
various man made plastics haz-
ardous to the environment...I'd

MY BEST FRIEND
OF 20 YEARS WHO
I MET YESTERDAY
WENT AWAY"
-TOM
08-18
"Still on your
Trail After All
These Years..."

All of the above quotes were written in pencil in the worker hut in Millinocket, Maine. I am so bummed that I didn't snap pictures of the sentimental scribblings about the mill closing down or the town hoe that everyone had a one night stand with. There was some very depressing poetry as well as funny writing on the wall. Oh well...guess you'll have to come out this way to see it...



THE STORY OF JOHNNY Z

This is a flash fiction story I wrote a while back as I've started to explore other genres of writing. I've dabbled in Non-fiction with short stories of my travels, as well as, research-based novels, but recently I have gotten into flash fiction, Science Fiction and young adult novels. I never used to understand why people wasted their time reading Science Fiction let alone writing it, but I've gotten to a point in my life where I've written enough of my travels. I will continue to write about them if I have the passion to do so while I'm sitting at the hop out waiting on a train or just between work lounging around looking for something to do, but fiction opens up the mind to a whole new realm of creativity. It's similar to going out there and painting a car or bridge or abandoned building, to developing a moniker, drawing or creating a character. Art is in many forms. If you can create a whole world, a story worth sharing with the rest of us, and better yet, if you have the ability to incorporate real life issues, economic problems and faults within our system, a la 1984 and Animal Farm, into a fictional piece I think it makes it even more powerful than saying it bluntly. You make the people reading your work draw the parallels and really think about the symbolism and meaning behind your words. Not every fictional piece must embody these qualities. Sometimes it's just nice to break out of your shell and write something different for a change to see what your mind is capable of and that's great too. I've written so many partially complete Science Fiction novellas and novels between working in the restaurant and tree work and packing parachutes and whatever the hell else there is to do when I need work, but I have trouble completing them. Travel or work get in the way and then there is writer's block, depression, anxiety, the highs and lows of life from being a human being, and pretty much any other emotions we all experience at some point or another in life that distract me from my work and completing it. This is a small piece of fiction that embodies the spirit of railroad culture between freight riders and workers living on well into the future. Take it for what it is...maybe you enjoy it...maybe you don't, but stories between 1,000 and 4,000 words are easiest to complete despite all the unread work I have lying around on the cloud in disarray.

They called him Johnny Z because of the huge scar that zigzagged down his leg after his accident. He had jumped off a freight train in the CSX yard right outside of Albany, NY. The train rolled way too fast, and he knew it, but last time he had gotten off in North Bergen, he spent a week in jail and didn't want to overshoot his destination this time. The train regularly stopped in that yard before heading on to New Jersey, but this time, it didn't. That raging beast sliced through there like a stampede passing industry and billowing plumes of smoke. Johnny panicked; he made a split-second decision, threw his pack off, clung to the rungs of the ladder, and tried to get a running start to hop off. It didn't work. His ankle snapped and folded under landing on the ballast. Loose scraps of metal that had fallen off a junk train earlier in the day sliced him wide open, embedding his shin with a crimson "Z." He laid there in shock in a pool of red ballast, fading in and out of consciousness. The last bit he remembered was a white SUV charging towards him. As his vision became pixelated and faded to black, clouds of dust intoxicated the air, and he passed out.

Tires skidded to a halt. Sergeant Mudd flung open his door and sprang up out of his vehicle, immediately radioing for backup.

"10-52, I REPEAT. We gotta 10-52 near the Fuera Bush overpass in the yard. Dispatch any units for urgent medical attention. He's losing a lotta blood. Looks like...ah, Caucasian male, late 20s to early 30s, dreads, face tattoo on his forehead...no sign of identification on em."

"Roger, nearest unit is 9-miles out by the Greyhound Station in Albany, over."

Mudd was a certified EMT and a railroad police officer for CSX and had been for the past 20 years. He'd seen many tramps and hoboes come through Selkirk over the years since it's a main hub for freight traffic sending trains as far as Chicago, IL, and as south as Hialeah, FL. In recent years, the number of freight riders had dwindled lower and lower as security measures in train yards increased post 9/11. Usually, Mudd pulled packs of these "Dirty Kids" off the train, with their dogs and banjos, wearing their studded jackets decked out in train patches and their grease-covered railroad caps, stick-and-poke tattoos and their conglomerate of hand-sewn patches covering every hole in their pants. But, times were different now. It was 2040, and Johnny was the first rider he'd seen in years. People didn't ride freight anymore. The culture had died long ago when the InstaGlam fad ended, and YourTube died out.

Mudd tied up Johnny's leg with a tourniquet to stop the blood from rushing out onto the ballast, staining the ground a sea of red. The kid looked bleak, pale white, and limp. Mudd wrapped him in his arms and waited for the ambulance. He'd seen dismembered bodies splayed along the tracks, people lose feet, hands, and fingers, but above all that, this touched him the most. He didn't know why.

Maybe it was his old age and the shadow of retirement closing in on him, birthing the privilege of the "American Dream." Perhaps it was the thought of losing a stranger in his arms, knowing he was old enough to be the kid's dad, and there was no way to contact his family. This kid was a ghost. In today's age, with geo-tracking, data-harvesting, CCTV, DNA passcodes, and Big Brother watching everyone's move, this was unheard of and near impossible in a cashless society.

Mudd envied the kid to some extent, the freedom, the adventure, walking the line, riding into the unknown, going anywhere he pleased. Mudd had never thought much about it before. His job kept him so preoccupied keeping kids out of the yard and off the trains, giving trespassing citations, jailing those with active warrants, and most importantly, making sure no one broke into the containers in the yard and stole merchandise. After all, his job was on the line if that kept happening, and he enjoyed his work, but his railroad days were slowly coming to an end.

Tears trickled down through the stubbles of his black beard, dripping off his pronounced jawline, and plunking onto the blood-red cobbles of stone. Sirens struck the air, and bright flashes lit up the sky as the ambulance sped down the gravel-access road towards them. The EMT's propped Johnny up on a gurney, strapping him tightly before rushing off to the nearest hospital in downtown Albany.

Local authorities took over the responsibility of filing charges against him from there. So Mudd finished his shift that night, figuring he'd visit the hospital in the morning to see how the kid was doing. But, morning came, and the kid had disappeared, vanishing to the streets unknown, and most likely, distances far away. Mudd never got the kid's real name and assumed "Johnny" was just an alias he had coined from looking through the kid's journals. He wrote some profound poetry and beautiful short stories of his travels, describing the places and people in great detail but leaving the locations a mystery, which drove Mudd insane. Where were these sunsets he spoke of so often? Where were these swimming holes and rivers where the bass and the muskies ran wild and free? The kid had hundreds of typed pages in his backpack with his signature scribbled at the end of each story.

Mudd read every entry, where he felt as if he knew this kid and his entirety, but really, he knew nothing about him other than his wanderlust and knack for words. He didn't know if the kid had a family or anyone in his life who cared about him. What was the kid's legal name, and age? Why would he ride freight along the Mohawk at the cusp of winter? Why not go south to warmer pastures? It was far too cold to be out here wandering around on the steel. But, that was the only reason he didn't completely bleed out, and it was the only information the hospital released to Mudd when he inquired. They weren't even entirely sure how Johnny had escaped custody with an officer on duty sitting out front of his room. They didn't have any answers for Mudd, but that never stopped him from looking...

The zinging of wheels rang around in Johnny's ears as he looked up at the creamy clouds, watching the bluest of skies roll by with a smile on his face; he was alive and well. At that moment, he reminisced of that horrible day, three years ago, where he had coined a new alias, "Johnny Z." Suddenly, the train stopped under the same overpass in Selkirk, NY. Johnny snapped out of his daze, looking up at the pointy brim hat, and the fat grin shining down. It was the railroad bull. He didn't try to run or hide. He just splayed out on the porch waiting for the railroad police.

"Hey there bub, someun called ya in, some foamer type takin' pic-chas of the train like twenty-sum miles away. We don't usually see you's types. Fact, last time one of you's gone through here was back when Mudd worked here years ago."

Johnny smirked, "Mudd, you say?"

"Yeah, bub...Jeremiah Mudd. He was the railroad bull here for twenty-sum years, went AWOL one day and hit the rails lookin' fer some kid...unno much 'bout it other than what the boys told me in the office. I signed on three years ago...name's Pete."

Johnny looked perplexed like he had something on his mind, but he didn't quite know what it was. He stood there in silence.

"Well, alright bub, if ya could step down off the train fer me. Ima need yer I.D., yer DNA passcode, and I hafta ask, you's got any weapons or drugs on ya?"

"Nope."

Johnny stepped up off the porch, snagging his pant leg on the metal grate, ripping it to the knee on his bum leg where the bulging scar touched the view of Pete's eye as he climbed down the ladder.

Pete's eyes widened, and his fat jaw dropped in exasperation, "lift up yer pant leg again there, bub."

"Umm...ok?"

Confused, Johnny rolled up his pant leg. He showed Pete his big, shiny, Z-shaped scar that bolted down his whole leg from beneath the kneecap to his ankle, in one, long, stitched zigzag. Pete hooted and hollered, slapping his thighs in astonishment.

"No goddamn way."

"What," said Johnny?

Pete proceeded to cuff Johnny and didn't say a word. He opened the back of his cruiser and pushed Johnny's head down and into the vehicle. Johnny figured it was another trip to paradise for a few days while the police tried to figure out his identity, what he was doing, and why he was there before they sent him on his way. They weren't going to get money for holding him so off he'd go. Johnny didn't care.

But instead, Pete circled back around towards the yard tower and put the vehicle in park by the office. He pulled Johnny out from the cruiser, took out his key, unlocked each handcuff, and gestured with his hands for Johnny to walk on ahead.

Johnny opened the door to the office and stared quizzically at the wall. His eyes shot up with cheer. He saw pictures of an old train rider with the widest of smiles, a thick black beard, and pronounced jawline, sitting in a boxcar. The guy must have been in his 60s or 70s judging by the wrinkles on his forehead and the crows that ran down around his meager eyes, but he was still out there riding hard and free. Johnny had only heard stories about the old Bo's, and to be honest, he didn't personally know any who still rode freight, especially in 2043.

"Who's that," Johnny asked Pete, who now stood behind him, looking at the same picture hanging from the wall.

"That mah frend is the man who saved yer life...that is Sergeant Mudd."

"Waitttt, Mudd...the ex-railroad bull? I never got the chance to thank the man who saved my life. First time I've been through here in years. He was a rider too?"

"I guess so kid...no idea...here...lemme show ya somethin'."

Pete took Johnny back into his private office and opened a small chest in the far corner behind a bunch of paperwork. Before Mudd took the final westbound this year, he left an accouterment of railroad memorabilia with his old co-workers. Pete pulled out hundreds of pages of typed diaries, and Johnny's eyes flared up.

"No freakin' way, dude. These are my diaries from years of my travels...every last one of em looks like they're here, but why?"

"Mudd read all of em, bub. Ya know rumor round the office says he spent three years lookin' fer yer ass. And now here ya are on our doorstep, showin' up like a stray cat."

Johnny flipped through the pages of his diaries. Every last one of his entries was there. At the very end, he noticed many more entries, on thicker paper, in hand-written ink like the old days, a bunch of new photographs of sunsets, swimming holes, mountains, moons, purple skies, moose, dunes and deep green forests; it looked magnificent. They were all of Mudd's photos, his travels, and journals. Then on the very last page, Johnny found Mudd's will.

It read, "Johnny Z, I found the Shangri-La you talked about on your travels, where the bass and the muskies roam wild and free, and the moose lay hidden in the deep green forests of the mountains by the John's."

Beneath that, a key was stuck to the message with thick tape and an address written below it. It said, "P.S., thanks for giving me life. Here's a key to the other side if you want to take a peek."



When Covid hit and started shutting a lot of businesses down I was in Mojave, California on my way to Bakersfield starting to make my trek back east. Every train I got on at that point I rode until termination. Getting food became more difficult because cities became a zombie apocalypse movie overnight...you couldn't eat at fast food restaurants unless you went through the drive through with a car, and places like Walmart were out of so much food I was living off a lot of canned Ravioli's and any random shit I could find that even during all this mayhem people did not wanna eat.

Anyway, I had a verbal agreement with my job, which I've had for the last three years, which pretty much goes as follows: when the season dies down after Thanksgiving, Christmas, and the New Year and the restaurant loses a lot of its customers to the cold and doesn't really start picking back up again until March or April, I leave. Each time it comes around they think I'm gonna stay, but I leave. I use this time to ride freight or if Kelly has time off we go camping, hiking or enjoy ourselves. By that point I no longer really see the point of why I'd punch a clock and stand around when the restaurant isn't busy and like clockwork there is always a position open when I come back, busser, server, dishwasher, cold bar prep, cook, banquet server for weddings, I've done them all, whatever is available at that time as long as my job isn't consuming my life.

But with Covid, I came back to no job and because I left right before all this happened I did not qualify for unemployment so I had a lot of downtime on my hands looking for work, and started getting into foraging wild mushrooms. I was amazed at how much free food is out there in New England: Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, all states I run through quite often on slow and low freight, all have a wide array of delicious mushrooms.

I researched much in the spring and summer of 2020 just learning as much as I could about foraging wild edibles and mushrooms. You can forage ramps (leeks) and fiddleheads, as well as, black trumpet chanterelles, chicken of the woods, golden chanterelles, a wide variety of boletes, and the list goes on and on and on. The best part is there is a common misconception that foraging mushrooms are dangerous and deadly. There definitely are deadly mushrooms out there, but if you use common sense, identify what you have found 100%, do spore prints and consult someone in your area who has a vast knowledge of what you've found in the field, you'll be fine. Start with foraging mushrooms that have no deadly or poisonous lookalikes and you'll be fine. Below I will go over some of the basics (very basic description) on how I started foraging and some resources of where you can learn about it if it piques your interest.

Maybe mushrooms interest you? Maybe they don't. I'm not gonna tell you what to do and how to do it, but this is how I got started. I researched as much as I could online on

“mushroomexpert.com,” “first-nature.com,” “champignouf.com,” “shroomery.org,” “foragedfoodie.blogspot.com,” and “libgen.is” to find ebooks on foraging mushrooms

Champignouf will give you a general idea of what you “might” be looking at. Key word being “might.” Pictures are never a standalone way to identify a species. You need a lot more information...what type of forest did you find the mushroom in, was it growing terrestrially or on dead wood, did it have gills or no gills, did it have a stipe or was it sessile, what color is the stipe and the cap, are the gills narrowly spaced, forked, marginate, are there radial notches, do they peel apart from the cap easily, how do they connect to the stipe, what is the spore print color. The list goes on and on and every detail is important especially for identifying species with poisonous and deadly lookalikes.

I have never eaten anything I wasn't 100% sure about and I always follow the basic rules below on what to avoid completely. This doesn't mean I don't study these species, by picking them, dissecting them, studying their gills, caps, stipes, and doing spore prints. I do all of that just for fun and to have an idea of what I am looking at, but generally, that is as far as I will ever go. Death is not worth it...

WHAT I AVOID:

- ⇒ LITTLE BROWN MUSHROOMS
- ⇒ WHITE GILLED MUSHROOMS
- ⇒ ANYTHING IN THE AMANITA SPECIES
- ⇒ MUSHROOMS THAT HAVE DEADLY OR POISONOUS LOOKALIKES
- ⇒ FOR ALL OTHER PURPOSES, MUSHROOMS THAT BRUISE BLUE (CERTAIN TYPES OF BOLETES) ALTHOUGH THE BI-COLOR BOLETE DOES THIS AND IS EDIBLE, THERE ARE MANY SIMILAR MUSHROOMS THAT ARE VERY SIMILAR TO THE BI-COLOR BOLETE AND ARE POISONOUS

You can get into foraging by starting out with easily identifiable mushrooms that do not have poisonous or deadly lookalikes. Go out after a nice rainfall and just search for mushrooms, looking on dead wood, the ground, by specific trees. If it's spring, summer or fall, different mushrooms will be out so you can take out a field guide and look for particular ones. The easiest to find when you're getting started are:

Dryad Saddle, Chicken of the Woods, Reishi, Black Trumpets, Lobster Mushroom, and Chaga

Reishi



You will generally find this mushroom growing on the decayed stumps of hemlock trees. It's very prevalent in the northeast and I've found it throughout the summer in coniferous forests. I've never really done anything with it thus far, but it's supposed to have many medicinal benefits making it a staple in Asia as a medicinal tea. Benefits of the mushroom include the following:

- ⇒ **Boosts the immune system**
- ⇒ **Anti-cancer fighting properties**
- ⇒ **Helps to fight fatigue and depression**

The needles for hemlock trees are uniquely attached to the stem which is very similar to spruce, but much finer. The needles of hemlock are flattened as well and generally you'll see different shades of green, which is a good indicator I use for identification. If you find the trees, you'll eventually find the mushroom.

<https://gardenerspath.com/plants/landscape-trees/identifying-conifers/>

Is a great place to go to help with identifying different conifers. I'm still an amateur and by no means an expert at trees. I'm much better in the spring time and summer when trees already have their leaves, but you can also use bark to help identify the tree you're looking for and when you get good enough at tree identification you can use it as a tool to find mushrooms. A great book to check out is **"Bark: A Field Guide to Trees of the Northeast"** and **"A Beginner's Guide to Recognizing Trees of the Northeast"**

Lobster Mushroom



The lobster mushroom isn't really a mushroom per se. *Hypomyces lactifluorum* parasitizes a *Russula brevipes* or *Lactarius piperatus* mushroom cutting off its ability to produce spores and turning it a reddish orange color that resembles a lobster. In my experience, these mushrooms prefer acidic soils and I have typically found them in the month of August in areas with dense conifers where there are a lot of pine needles on the ground. If you see Saffron Milk Caps or Russulas nearby, look around for Lobster Mushrooms, clear piles of wet, dead leaves and you'll probably see some of these guys lurking around. They make for a great addition to any dish.

For more information: https://www.mushroomexpert.com/hypomyces_lactifluorum.html



Chaga



This is another mushroom that has many medicinal properties and is consumed as a tea. I personally grind up chaga into a powder and make tea with it, putting a dab of Vermont maple syrup to add a little flavor to it. When I was wandering the woods with a buddy we found chaga growing on three different types of birch, paper birch, black birch and yellow birch. If you see gnarly black fissures growing off of birch trees, it is most likely chaga, a parasitic bracket fungus that strictly grows on birch. It is very tough and rigid and does not easily come off of the tree so you'll want to have a knife in hand. When you cut off chunks the exterior will look a charcoal-black color, but the interior will look like a pleasing amber or a rusty yellow-brown. This is chaga. The optimal time to find chaga is during the fall and winter months on living birch trees. Sometimes you'll get lucky and find it growing at the base, but more often than not, it can grow high up in the tree and unless you are an avid climber or have access to a ladder it might not be easily foraged in this scenario.

For more information: https://www.mushroomexpert.com/inonotus_obliquus.html



Black Trumpets



I usually find Black Trumpets in late summer or early fall. I try to walk particularly slow, looking straight down and scanning the area thoroughly. These mushrooms are extremely hard to see because they blend in with the fallen leaves and landscape around them with their camouflaged colors, but once you find one or two, you will normally find patches growing throughout the woodlands scattered about, and you can find yourself walking away with ½ a pound or more. I always find this mushroom near water, growing on mossy banks or inclined slopes, coming up through leaf litter debris in moist areas in shaded areas of hardwoods, but I've also found plenty in coniferous forest.

The mushroom is extremely easy to ID because there are no poisonous look-a-likes, which make them perfect for the beginner mushroom hunter. They literally look like black trumpets coming up out of the ground. They are vase-shaped or look like bull-horns, usually black, dark gray or with a slight brownish hue and almost always found in shade because when in the sun, they dry out rather quickly. The top of the cap is more or less round, usually ruffled at the edge with almost a brim that rolls outward like a trumpet. Upon aging their edges dry out and normally split down the mushroom. Certain varieties can have pimple-like splotches on the funnel. The mushrooms lack true gills and are smooth, crinkled or can have vaguely slight wrinkles that mimic gills.

Black Trumpets are mycorrhizal mushrooms and love forests with a lot of shade. You can find them along creek beds and along the edges of disturbed hiking trails in damp, rich, dark, moist soil. Moss is a big indicator, and best of all, in the summer they are a good indicator mushroom for Chanterelles, which more advanced mushroom foragers seek in the summer months. I often sell pounds and pounds of these to the restaurant I frequently work at between riding freight and traveling.

For more Information: <https://foragedfoodie.blogspot.com/2018/09/identifying-black-trumpet-mushrooms.html>

Chanterelle (Intermediate Mushroom w/poisonous look-a-like)



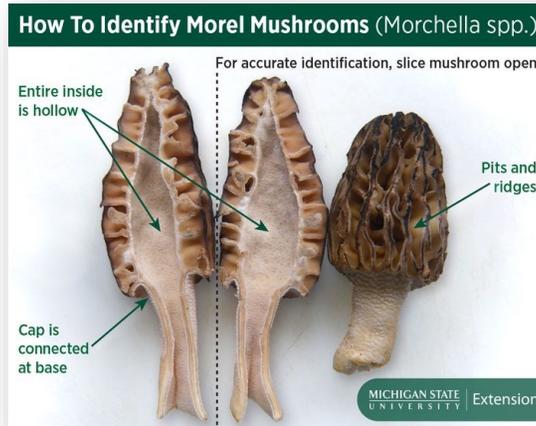
The Chanterelle *can* be used to describe a group of related genera (that's plural for genus): Cantharellus, Craterellus, Gomphus, and Polyozellus. Craterellus, however, it is most commonly used to refer to Golden Chanterelles, which are highly sought after by gourmet restaurants and have a competitive price in the industry, much like black trumpets.

I find this mushroom almost always in coniferous forests growing terrestrially and NOT ON WOOD, in patches or scattered about on inclines and near water. For some reason, I find it more plentifully in conifers than in hardwoods, in shady areas on slopes, however, the few spots I have found it in in hardwood forests have been near mossy patches with ferns nearby in birch groves in the likes of Merck Forest. THIS IS AN ADVANCED MUSHROOM. I say that because of the poisonous look-a-likes, Hygrophoropsis Aurantiaca, the False Chanterelle, often times very similar looking but more orange in color, with usually a discolored dot in the center of its cap, sometimes brownish, with very shallow true gills, oftentimes acting like false gills, growing on wood, and a much thinner, longer stem. Then there is Omphalotus Illudens (Jack-O-Lantern) mushroom growing gregariously in clumps on dead or dying wood, at the base of trees, bright orange in color, with orange flesh throughout when sliced, true gills, instead of wrinkles or folds.

For more information:

<https://foragedfoodie.blogspot.com/2021/07/how-to-identify-golden-chanterelles.html>

Morels (Intermediate Mushroom w/Deadly Look-a-like)



Morels grow in the springtime in mid to late May usually, but are highly dependent on weather like every mushroom. They do have a poisonous lookalike, the False Morel, which is a brainy mushroom that has flesh all the way through it, whereas, the true morel is hollow inside and the cap is connected to the base as seen in the picture above provided by MSU. Morel foraging skirts just outside the beginner foraging stage and you should do so with caution if you plan to eat them because if you are careless you could end up getting really sick. False Morels, *Gyromitra Esculenta*, contain the same chemical that's in rocket fuel and ingesting this could be deadly. So pay attention. I tend to find morels after a nice rainfall in hardwood forests particularly near dead or dying Elm Trees or living Elm trees, as well as, in old apple orchards.

For more information: <https://www.first-nature.com/fungi/morchella-esculenta.php>







IT'S BEEN 5 YRS 9-21 E80
SINCE I MADE A SKYDIVE...
FINALLY BACK IN THE AIR
AFTER ALL THESE YRS.
FORGOT HOW MUCH I MISSED
IT. HOW IT MADE ME FEEL
ALIVE. TRAINS AND PLANES
HAVE CHANGED MY LIFE THEY
KEPT ME FIGHTING. I'M STILL HERE!!



South Bound
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THE Solo
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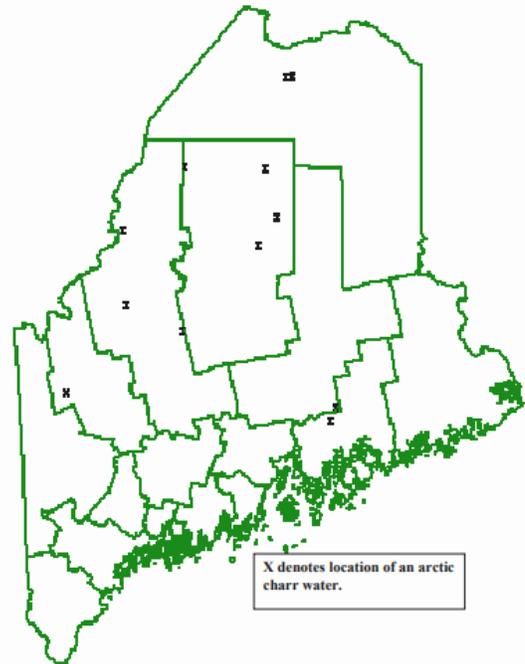


THE WOOD CHIP TRAIN CAN
TAKE YOU TO CANADA MAN
THE WOOD CHIP TRAIN CAN



ARCTIC CHARR

Maine is the only state where arctic charr exist outside of Canada and the high country in the arctic supporting populations of this species in 12 of its lakes located specifically in three watersheds, the St. John, the Union, and the Penobscot. This oligotrophic species dwell in deep, cold lakes that are well-oxygenated, living in the benthic zone with temperatures preferably below 10°C, but they aren't strictly bottom dwellers. They aren't often seen by anglers despite coexisting with planktivores and brook trout. Often times it is hard to distinguish arctic charr from brook trout due to similar physical characteristics.



“Arctic charr in Maine are descendants of anadromous, or sea-run, arctic charr that populated coastal waters after several glaciation events during the Pleistocene era.”

The most important management action for charr is that the use of bait fish has been prohibited in heritage fisheries. Though mainly lake-dwelling they are also sea-run creatures and are an endangered species, which is why habitual efforts continue to keep the populations from going extinct through regulations and breeding. Considerations of moving arctic charr populations due to invasive smelt have been discussed as recent as 2018 to protect the populations as they are one of the oldest strain in North America. Smelt was most probably introduced to lakes and ponds as bait in violation of Maine laws protecting designated conservation areas such as Bald Mountain Pond. I couldn't find any concrete plans for translocation of the species from its original water source as this takes resources and time, not to mention the red tape involved with policy makers and budgets, but it would appear that we will see a decrease in these populations over the years due to global warming, invasive species whose primary food source are plankton and people not following laws regarding bait usage.

STUCK IN McADAM