

Leon Pantenburg  
Bend, Or.

### **John Muir Trail Journal**

*On Feb. 28, 1976, the day I graduated from Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa with a Journalism degree. From then until the middle of June, I worked at a grocery store in Ames while waiting for my Peace Corps application to be processed.*

*But after growing up in the Iowa flatlands, I was wild to try backpacking in the mountains. I migrated west, and spent several weeks with a college buddy, John Nerness, of Mountainview, Ca. We did several dayhikes and spent a week hiking through the Bighorn Mountains in Wyoming.*

*That's another story. This one starts outside Los Angeles on Highway 5. I got a ride to Riverside, then got to a hitchhiking corner in San Bernadino and stuck out my thumb. Got several interesting rides that day, ending up with two hippies (They actually did say "Far out!") in a decrepit Comet stationwagon.*

*The car broke down in Little Lake, out in the middle of the desert, so we stopped for the night. The two hippies checked into the hotel and I went out into the desert to camp. I was supposed to wake them at dawn and then we'd continue on to the tip of Devil's Canyon Park.*

#### **Thursday, July 22**

Awoke at dawn, ready to go. Went down to the hotel to wake up the hippies, but they weren't ready to go. About 11 a.m. they were, so we took off. Made it to Independence, then I took off for the mountains.

Got a ride with two women hikers to the Sierras, then I took off, alone at last, I thought.

Ran into a Boys Club group from Camarillo, Ca. and they invited me to join them, so I did, because they were going to take the same route. Had a good time talking to the kids, and the counselors are a lot of fun.

They've been feeding me, and I've been teaching them things from the outdoors, drawing from my meager store of experiences. Found a canteen cup and also broke the tip off my fishing rod somehow. Gonna take a while to get used to the rod. Hope I meet somebody with some epoxy.

As we reached Kersarge Pass, it started to rain. It hadn't rained up here for about three months, so naturally, it would have to rain tonight. Weather turned colder and I was sure I was in for another first night in the Bighorns. (It rained and snowed all night, and left a several-inch accumulation.)

My bag got damp, but never cold, so I wasn't uncomfortable, lying under the plastic, watching the rain fall.

## Friday, July 23

Woke up and the rain was still falling, so I went back to sleep and woke up later when the water started flowing through the bag. Got up, during a lull, and dressed and covered everything up. Luckily, my boots didn't get wet.

I'm sitting here in the sun, waiting for my bag to dry out. Am really proud of myself, because all I got wet was the bag and a pair of socks I left outside to be washed.

Left the Boys Club group about noon, as soon as all my stuff was dry. Mike, one of the counselors, gave me a bunch of food they didn't need. Left with my pack weighing more than ever. Not that I'm complaining.

Hiked past the Bullfrog Lakes, and finally got on the John Muir Trail. The skies kept looking like rain as I headed for the pass. Intermittent rain all the way, and I had to stop a few times to sit out a particularly heavy rainfall. Climbing over the pass was some of the roughest climbing I've done. The path was clear, but I must have walked about 10 miles to make it to the Rae Lakes. The air was very thin, and I'd walk about 10 steps, then have to stop and rest.

When I hit the lakes, I mixed up a quart of dry milk and chugged it. Really tasted great! I guess I'm getting used to the trail, because normally, I don't like the stuff.

I haven't got the stove (a Svea 123 that had worked fine on the Bighorns hike a couple weeks earlier) to light yet, so I was forced to eat cold food again.

Camped for the night at the tip of the lakes. My camp was one of those calendar-type places, with green grass, clear lakes and all that. I could see lots of trout, but I didn't fish because I couldn't cook them if I did catch a few.

Went to sleep about dusk, hoping it wouldn't rain again. I'd like to get an early start tomorrow, because with the weekend coming on, more backpackers are sure to come in. I've yet to find a place where I was all alone at the campsite.

## Saturday, July 24

Woke at dawn, and watched the sun rise over the mountains while still in my sleeping bag. It didn't rain last night, but there was a lot of dew, so I'm letting my stuff dry out. I'm sitting on a rock in the sun, feeling warm and dry for the first time in a couple days.

I hope the sun stays out, so I can go for a swim, and cover some ground today. I'll have to climb out of this valley before I can hit the trail again. I really like the High Sierras, and the John Muir Trail is really breathtaking (scenery-wise and also in the terms of breathing in the thin air!)

Tried to light the stove again, but with no luck. Soon, I'll be able to light a campfire and I can cook on that, I hope. These new fangled camp stoves are OK, but I can't get them to work.

Met the forest ranger and he almost gave me a ticket. I was sleeping on the grass, too near the water. I helped him put out a campfire, so he let me off with a warning.

I took off about 10 a.m. I keep trying for early starts, but something always screws me up. So far, I've had to dry my gear out every morning. My goal today

was Mather Pass, but I missed it by about 5 miles. Covered about 15 miles altogether. Am averaging about 2 miles per hour. This is a pretty good clip, considering I haven't gotten below 10,000 feet in the last day or so.

Went over Pinchot Pass (elevation 12,100 feet) in the late afternoon. The climbing was really steep, and I could take about 10 steps, then have to rest.

As usual, it was drizzling as I climbed up. The trail wasn't difficult, just the thin air was a problem.

I came down to Lake Charlotte, then hiked about a mile further to camp for the night. Keep running into the packers at the campsites. Most of them are really friendly, but you run into a few that are assholes.

Camped for the night in a little grove of pines. It's hard up here to find many trees because of the altitude. I found a nice, level spot and it looks pretty sheltered. The sky is clear and I hope it doesn't rain again. Having to dry out my equipment every morning ruins my early starts. Besides, the rain I run into every day as I go over the passes makes everything damp anyway by the time I'm ready to set up camp. I'm optimistic, though, because things can't really get much worse. I should be heading down for a couple of days.

Finally got the stove to work. From the sputtering it was doing, I think maybe it wasn't getting enough air because of the altitude. Hot meals are really nice, after eating sardines for 2 days.

#### Sunday July 25

Last night was the worst I've spent in the mountains so far. It rained all night, and I got completely soaked in my sleeping bag. The rain started after I was sound asleep, and drenched me before I even woke up. (I'd slept under the stars, and not bothered to set up the tarp).

The bag kept me warm, but it was sure was wet and clammy. Stayed awake most of the night. The rain kept stopping, then pouring down, so I kept getting wet, then getting wetter.

My camp was at 10,500 feet, so the temperature was pretty cold. Some of my clothes got wet, but I made sure to keep my boots dry. It was very difficult to get up this morning. Everything was wet, but I couldn't stay in the bag because it was soaked.

Got up, wrung it out and placed everything on rocks to dry. The sun is just coming up over the mountains, and the sky is clear. Looks like another nice day. I hope I can clip off another 15 miles today. I'm about 5 miles from Mather Pass, and the pass may slow me down. Guess I'll go whomp up some oatmeal for breakfast. I've developed into an early to bed, early to rise, type, because I've written all this and it's only about 6 a.m.

Hiked over Mather Pass, 7.5 miles away from Lake Charlotte. The weather has been cloudy all day, but no real rain. I thought I might break my perfect record of always crossing mountain passes in the rain. About half way over Mather Pass, the heavens opened up and drenched me.

Have been trying to dry my sleeping bag by carrying it open on my pack, but it hasn't been very successful.

The whole trail goes along the crest, and the scenery is really beautiful.

Mather Pass was 12, 080 feet, and again, had some trouble walking and breathing at the same time.

Tonight I'm camped by a stream down in the meadows somewhere. For the first time, I can build a fire and it's really nice. Had mac and cheese for supper, and had no problem eating the whole thing myself.

Talked to two other hikers, on their way to Onion Valley from Yosemite. They said it was about 11 days from where I am tonight.

Have been devoting considerable thought to the problem of what to do when I reach Yosemite. A girl I met on the trail said there would be no problem about finding supplies in Yosemite.

I only have \$27 to my name right now, so if I bought grub, I'd have to hitchhike home. I'd really like to finish up the trip at Lake Tahoe.

Have seen more people today than any other day, probably because it's Sunday. At one time, I had eight backpackers walking behind me. This is a little ridiculous. I couldn't get lost if I wanted to!

A hiker told me that the Air Force, or somebody, is seeding the clouds to make it rain up here. It figures. The first time I'm in the Sierras, it rains four days straight. Wish the weather would clear up. I need a bath, bad, and I refuse to wash in the rain.

My bag dried out pretty good and the sky looks clear. What this probably means is that it's going to snow. Oh well, sure is cozy here by the fire, watching the stream...

Monday July 26

Today broke my record of always sleeping in the rain. Last night was clear and cool – beautiful weather to sleep outside in.

The sky is clear, and today looks like it's going to be a beautiful day. I hope I can do some fishing, finally, because I've been eating like a pig, and may run out of food before I reach Yosemite. Saw several deer this morning as they came down to drink out of the creek.

It was really neat, I was about 20 yards away from them in my sleeping bag, and they didn't even see me. It was a really pretty setting; the pine needles underfoot, the tall trees, the creek and the deer...Wow! It looked like something out of "Bambi."

I'm getting ready to head out – destination: Deer Meadow or something like that. I don't have to do any more rough climbing for a few days, it looks like.

Made it to Muir Pass at the end of the day. Climbed until almost dark then reached the stone shelter. The elevation is 12,080 feet, the highest I've ever slept.

The shelter was about 20 feet by 20 feet, and igloo-type shelter. It had a fireplace, benches to sleep on and a table. The place was really cozy, except the roof leaked very badly and made everything wet. As usual, my sleeping bag got wet but kept me warm.

Took a swim today and damn near froze to death when I jumped in. The water was very cold, and almost gave me cardiac arrest!

While I was swimming, another guy came along and joined me. He was

headed for Mt. Whitney. He gave me about two pounds of a trail snack he made and it really hit the spot. It had almonds, dates, sunflower seeds etc. in it, and is really filling. I munched on it all day and I hiked along. He also told me about a hot springs along the way, and I think I'll have to go try them out when I have the chance.

*Met a nice couple in about their 50s as I headed for Muir Pass. It started to rain, so I ducked under their dining fly and jawed with them a while. They've both been all over the Sierras backpacking and they really seem to enjoy it. **Hope I'm that spry when I'm their age.***

Food looks like it may be a problem soon. I haven't had the chance to fish at all. This pisses me off, as well as it cuts into my food supply. Hope tomorrow is nice.

Right now, I'm standing in the door of the shelter, watching the storm clouds gather on the pass. This place seems really desolate, but safe. Rain ain't gonna bother me tonight!

## **Tuesday July 27**

Woke at dawn, the sky was dark and rain looked threatening, but still the view was fantastic. I could see 20 miles in any direction – all mountains.

Hiked on to the Colby Meadows and stopped down the creek about one mile. I had decided I would dry out my bag and eat lunch as soon as I could.

I was directly on a cliff about six feet above the water. I could see down into the pool to the bottom, another six feet. I decided to take a quick dip, and bath, in three stages:

- 1) Jump in to wet down.
- 2) Soap down, and rinse off all the suds on shore, well back from the water.
- 3) Jump in again to swim.

As I finished step three, (accompanied, as always, by a loud scream as I hit the water) I heard cheering and applause. I looked around, and there were the five female hikers I'd talked to at the base of Muir Pass. Caught somewhat off guard, and being stark naked, I could only think of one thing to do. I bowed gravely to the crowd, acknowledged the applause, and invited them to lunch.

After I put on my clothes, we all cooked up a pot luck of whatever anybody had. It tasted pretty good, and nobody threw up.

Shortly after this, it started to rain (as usual) so I walked the rest of the afternoon with my poncho on. I couldn't see any point in stopping and getting wet, when I could travel and get wet.

I slogged along until the rain quit, about 4 p.m. Camped in the fork of the Piute Creek in a pine grove by the Palisade River, The scene was really nice, and I built a fire to sit by and look at. Also tried a new dish: Mac and cheese and a few green peas. Tasted really good – hunger is the best sauce.

The night proved uneventful, except for the thunderstorm in the middle of the night. The wind nearly blew everything out of camp. I just pulled the plastic over me and went back to sleep. Getting rained on every night is getting to be a

common experience.

### **Wednesday, July 28**

Awoke at dawn, and took off as usual with a soggy sleeping bag and about half my clothes damp.

Finally got out of the Kings Canyon National Park and am now in the John Muir Wilderness area.

Got lost twice today, but nothing serious. Merely got on the wrong trail and didn't find it out until my landmarks didn't match.

Decided to stop by the hot springs to take a hot bath, but they were closed because too many people had the same idea. I took the wrong turn, and ended up about three miles in the wrong direction, so I had to backtrack and lost about two hours. I pushed on hard, because it looked like rain, and sure enough, about 11 a.m. came my daily soaking.

The Edison Power and Light Company of L.A. has been seeding the clouds of the mountains, according to the latest trail gossip. They have been very successful in their efforts, and I've been thinking of blowing up one of their electric generators to show my appreciation. (*This was written 25 years before 9/11. My comment was meant to be funny! I did not then, nor have I ever been serious about causing harm to an electrical generating facility! Homeland Security – leave me alone!*) Will soon be in danger of starvation if I don't get moving. The rain slows me down too much in the daytime, when it rains every afternoon.

Got to the base of Seldon Pass and it started to rain. I stood until a pine tree for about 20 minutes, waiting for it to stop, then it started to hail and the wind to blow.

Getting wet very quickly and starting to freeze, I decided to go on. There was no shelter for about three miles on either side of the pass, so I damn near froze.

The paths all looked like creeks, because the water ran down them. Consequently, I had to walk along side of them. My boots got soaked very quickly, and the rest of me matched.

I got over the pass finally, one of the worst stretches of hiking I'd ever done. My descent to the valley was uneventful, the terrain being gentle and soaked.

Got turned around when I mistook a stream for the path and followed it. When I found a lake that wasn't supposed to be there, I checked my map, took a compass reading and found I was headed in the wrong direction. Backtracked and found the trail again.

Camped beside the river, and for a change, didn't get rained on. Woke up in the middle of the night and the fog was very thick. I must have been in the middle of a cloud, because I was up about 10,500 feet. At any rate, it soaked all my stuff very effectively and ruined my plans for an early start.

### **Thursday, July 29**

*Been out one week today. Funny, it seems like a hundred years! Actually, I'm*

*having a good time!*

Woke up at dawn and everything was wet, so I went back to sleep until the sun was higher. I'm sitting in the sun, waiting for my gear to dry so I can pack up and leave. The sky is clear, and it looks like a beautiful day. It probably will be until the afternoon rain storm.

The rain storm today was very light and didn't slow me down at all. Made it over Bear Ridge and camped down beside the river by a bridge.

I'd thought that I'd be all alone, since I hadn't seen anyone all the while I was crossing Bear Ridge, but this proved to be false. As I reached the campground, I saw several people camped there. No way can I get completely away from other people.

*Today, I had a cup of coffee with a backpacker who was 68 years old. He was a really nice guy, and knew the Sierras like the back of his hand. He told me several stories about how packing was 50 years ago. Really a fascinating old guy.*

*He walked with his pack as if he were a much younger man, and it looked like it weighed more than mine!*

The stove got fixed today. A guy had a cleaning tool for it, and he cleaned it for me. Now I have hot food again! Really neat how hot grub can improve your morale out here. I was giving serious thought to beating that stove to death with a rock!

At night camp, I met three guys heading for Yosemite also. Sat and jawed with them around the campfire. They're running out of food also, so it looks like we'll have to stock up at Red's Meadow.

The night looks clear, so maybe I'm in for some nice weather. It's about time. Elevation at tonight's camp – 8,500 feet.

### **Friday, July 30**

Woke at dawn, with everything wet. Last night, about 3:30 a.m., had a hell of a storm. Rained for 20 minutes and - as usual – got everything wet. I hardly woke up – just pulled the plastic over me and went back to sleep.

This morning, one of the guys gave me a bar of Dial. For the first time since Kearsarge Pass I have some soap! This calls for celebration, which I shall do, as soon as I find a pool. I may have problems re-adjusting to the warm showers of civilization after this.

Right now, waiting for the gear to dry out. Sky looks cloudy, so I will probably get wet going over Silver Pass. It's about 6.5 miles from my campsite, so the sky will have ample time to cloud up, and Edison Power and Light will have time to seed the clouds.

*Still, even the lousy weather can't change the beauty of this mountain range. It's all worth it, when I come over a ridge and can look at all the trees and mountains. The mountains are so beautiful in the mornings, I usually get up early just to watch the sunrise.*

*The air is so clear, and usually scented with pine needles. Walking through the forest is like walking through a cathedral. The trees are so straight, and their*

*branches almost block out the sun.*

*Underfoot, there is a thick carpet of pine needles, which muffles my foot steps. I have walked right up on several herds of deer, just because I was so quiet.*

*I'm really glad to be out here, lousy weather and all. I'm gonna have a hell of a time going back to Iowa after being in the mountains.*

Maybe I can buy one, and take it back home with me. Dad would let me put it in the cow pasture. Then the kids could ski on it during the winters, and I could lead backpacking expeditions in the summer.

ENOUGH of this dribble, I gotta hit the trail. Everything is just about dried out.

Made about 15 miles today. Camped with a guy, whose name I never even knew. He'd come from Mount Whitney, and had been doing 20 miles a day. He was a really nice guy, offering to give me a meal when he knew I was running low. When I wasn't looking, he filled my fuel cylinder with gas.

Our camp was at Lake Purple, about 10,000 feet. It rained all afternoon on us, and we decided to stop at the lake for the night.

I slung the plastic over a rope between two trees, used my poncho for a ground cloth and my pack for a pillow. It was quite comfortable and dry.

I had an omelet made of powdered eggs for supper. It wasn't too bad.

Rained, on and off, all night and the temperature got really low. As long as my bag is semi-dry, I have no trouble staying comfortable.

My last memory of last night was listening to the rain fall on the plastic and thinking: "Gee, I sure am getting gawd-awful sick of this f---ing rain."

### **Saturday, July 31**

Was awakened about dawn, by the other guy getting up, and taking off. It was barely light, and drizzling lightly, and I couldn't see how he could muster up the ambition to be up and out at that ungodly hour, under those weather conditions.

I got up as soon as the drizzle slowed down and packed all my stuff wet. I had to make Red's Meadow that day, because I was just about out of food. So, without breakfast, I trudged off. I'd been walking about 5 minutes when it started to rain, so I walked the entire 13 miles in the rain.

Red's Meadow is probably the only place for 60 miles that one can get supplies at, so every backpacker stops there on his way by.

The store itself is a one-room, general store. It carries all the staple food, plus a supply of foot powder, fishing lures and that type of thing. The prices looked like they came from "The Gouger's Handbook."

Fresh milk (quart) costs 48 cents, and dehydrated packets were 55 cents. Soups and anything remotely related to backpacking was about 20 cents per item higher than they would have been in town.

The owner had quite a monopoly. Things like ice cream were reasonable, since you couldn't pack them out.

I arrived about 3 p.m. It was a rainy Saturday afternoon, and the place looked like a backpacking convention. There were packs of every size, color and

shape. The owners were as motley a bunch as I've ever seen. There were the slick dudes, with their new Kelty packs and matching accessories, next to the scruffy bums, like me, in our ratty clothes and well-used equipment.

The whole parking lot looked like a hobo convention, with groups sitting around their camp stoves cooking dinner. There was a café there, but the prices were unreal.

My mouth was watering for a hamburger, but it would have cost \$3.00! I put down my pack next to a group from Massachusetts and went into the store.

The store looked like heaven to me, being half-starved and only eating two meals a day for several days. Here was all this food, and all I had to do was eat it!

I started out with a quart of milk, and chugged it. Then I ate a 7 oz. bag of potato chips, 3 candy bars, a Twinkie, and some ice cream. After nine days without anything to provide energy, I tried to make it up all at once.

The store was a mail drop too, so I sent postcards. There was a telephone there, so I called my parents and told them what I was doing. They didn't seem very surprised. (They knew I was hiking in the Sierras, but not how far I planned to go!)

Since tomorrow is Sunday, I decided to try and avoid the tourist rush. I took the wrong path, and ended up at Minneret Lakes. The signs on the trail were very confusing most of the time. Usually, you see a sign, and four trail, so you don't know what trail goes where.

I hiked until close to dark, going higher all the time. I figured if the elevation was high enough, I'd get snowed on instead of getting wet. At least, the snow wouldn't get me as wet, as fast (11,200 feet.)

Set up my tarp between two trees, and was very comfortable, considering the soaking I'd gotten the rest of the day.

Sunday, August 1

Got snowed on last night, and about an inch of accumulation on everything. I just shook off everything and was ready to go. The day was very clear, and the sky was a dark blue. It looked like a nice day, and to my surprise, it was!

For the first time since I started there was no rain at all, all day.

I was really surprised, but kept my poncho handy in case of a sudden shower. The day started out with me cooking up some brown rice while everything dried out. As I was doing this, a man came over and gave me some food, because their group was leaving and didn't want to pack it out. I now have lots to eat again, and I made sure I did. I had to buy some canned stuff at Red's Meadow, and I really felt foolish. It reminded me of the Great Des Moines River Expedition and I'm sure John would laugh if he saw my pack! It was heavy, as well as taking up a lot of room. I made sure I'd eat that stuff up first.

To get out of the Minneret Lakes area, I had to climb over a pass. I didn't get rained on, but the climbing was really rough. The area didn't get used very much so the trail wasn't marked well at all.

Most of the time, just little piles of rocks were all I had to follow. I lost the trail

and had to freelance a little. After some very rough rock work, I got to the other side.

The John Muir Trail was about three miles east of the pass, so I walked down to it and started north again. Like last Sunday, I ran into a lot of traffic on the trail and was glad to get back to the high trail again.

I crossed Island Pass (with no rain, yet!) and decided to camp at the base of Donahue Pass. Camped beside a stream up about 11,000 feet. The place is really peaceful – cool though – and I am sleeping on a bed of pine needles tonight. The sky looks clear, and the stars are really big and bright.

Monday August 2

Eleventh day out! Really doesn't seem like I've been out here that long. I started out about a mile in front of Donahue Pass and crossed it this morning.

I was surprised it didn't rain last night, but there was sure a lot of frost on everything this morning.

I was up and gone by about 7 a.m. Had a candy bar for breakfast and decided to make Tualamee Meadows before I took a break for dinner (about 14 miles).

After Donahue Pass, the descent was very rough and took about three hours. There were a lot of switchbacks, and the constant going down made my knees hurt. The trail was fairly rocky and hard on one's feet.

At the bottom was about eight miles of flatland to Tualamee. I clipped along quit quickly, stopping once to wash my feet and a pair of socks.

Got into Tualamee about 3 p.m. and bought some almonds, candy bars and an orange. The store was about four miles away on the highway, so I decided not to walk on in and get more food.

I headed for Yosemite Valley about 4 p.m. The sign said: "Vogelsang 5.7 miles" so I figured I'd be there in about 2-1/2 hours. I arrived there about 3-1/2 hours later. That was the longest 6 miles I ever walked! Me thinks the sign lied because I can walk faster than 1-1/2 mph!

Am finished with the John Muir Trail now, since it stopped at Tualamee Meadows. I walked an unnecessary two miles, just so I could say I walked the whole distance. It's hard to believe I really made it.

I suppose I should be proud, but right now, all I feel is an aching in my feet!

I camped by the lake at Vogelsang. This is real bear country, I've been told. So I hung the food I had left in a tree, and used a counterweight system.

Actually the biggest problem I have out here are the chipmunks. They're so bold and unafraid, they'll run right over your sleeping bag in the night. They also get into your pack and eat anything they can chew into. Maybe hanging my grub in the tree will protect it from the chipmunks. At any rate, the night is clear and cold and my sleeping bag feels really warm.

Another camper told me a bear got somebody else's food last night, so he'd probably be back. I'm camped well away from the rest of the campers, I hope I'll be passed if he shows up again tonight. At any rate, I'm beat. As long as the bear doesn't wake me up, he's welcome to try to get my food supply.

Tuesday August 3

Well, the bear did show up last night. However, he didn't get any of my food and I scared him into the next mountain range. The bear also almost gave me a heart attack in the process.

I was peacefully sleeping away, when I became conscious of something moving at the bottom of my sleeping bag. Thinking it was a chipmunk, I kicked at it a couple times to frighten it away. The pesky devil wouldn't leave, so I struggled my head and shoulders out of the bag and grabbed the flashlight.

I turned it on and gave a loud yell, intending to scare the chipmunk away. My light shined directly into the face of a huge bear. His head and shoulders were in the shelter.

At the sight of this, I gave a much louder yell than originally intended, and the bear left, in a big hurry.

I spent the rest of the night jumping at every little noise.

Was awake at dawn, and saw my food supply was safe so I took off from Vogelsang. Took the Fletcher Creek trail, then another until I reached the High Sierra Camp. I bought some candy bars and decided to do another four miles from Merced Lake, where the pack camp was.

Met two young women from Michigan, backpackers, who were doing the same thing as I was: Hitch-hiking, backpacking and bumming around. We decided to walk together for a while.

We hiked and hiked because we missed the campsite about four miles away. We walked through a forest and picked up some of the big pinecones. They are huge, some of them being 12-to-14-inches long.

We finally came to a campsite by the river, which looked fairly popular. I'd been hearing bear stories from other hikers, so I made sure there was a tall tree to hang food in.

The river was warm so we all went for a swim. It felt nice to be clean again, relatively anyway. Can't wait till tomorrow, so I can take a shower in Yosemite Valley.

The camp is really peaceful, the water rushes by silently, and the sky is clear. We all sat around the campfire for a while and shot the bull. I was impressed by the independence the young ladies showed. I don't know many women who would do what they're doing.

**Wednesday August 4**

Had a rather short night. As soon as the group split for the night and it got really dark, the bears moved in.

I got out my pans and flashlight and proceeded to raise hell in order to scare them away. The bears were quite professional in their pillaging, and also quite thorough. They went directly to where my food cache was in the tree and ripped it down.

I couldn't jump and touch the bag, but the biggest bear reached up and sort of swatted the whole bundle down. It looked like a kid dunking a basketball, with

the jump and everything. My stuff sack split like a ripe melon, and my carefully-hoarded food spilt out. The bears ate much of it, and spoiled what they couldn't eat.

Meanwhile, the Michigan hikers were really scared. They were afraid to leave the tent, but afraid to stay inside. Both of them grabbed cooking utensils and came to join me in noise. We must have looked like a marching band as we walked around, banging on our pans and calling the bears dirty names.

The bears, for the most part, totally ignored us. Hell, the noise might have attracted them! The girls' food escaped destruction because we chased them away from the tree it was tied in.

The bears finally left, and everyone went back to their respective beds. Occasionally, one would wander back, and I'd chase it away. Finally, I just gave up and went to sleep.

The bears pawed all through my pack, but I'd taken out all the food and left the pockets unzipped. They didn't hurt the pack, but one chewed up John's leather gloves while I watched. I shined the light on it and hit the pans together, but the bear ignored me totally.

I got up at dawn and prepared to leave. The Michiganans offered me some of their food, but I declined, since they would be out several more days.

I walked along the trail, and the sign said I was only about five miles from the valley. It was very early, and the sun was coming up over the mountains. The sun's rays were all the colors of the rainbow, and there was nobody there to see it but me.

Vernal Falls were magnificent. The water fell hundreds of feet straight down from the granite river bed. It made a roar that could be heard for about a mile.

All too soon, I was on the valley floor and among the tourists. I was resentful. All this gorgeous natural beauty and sounds of nature, and you'd still see people carrying radios as they rode up the trail on their mules. I didn't hide my contempt for such people.

After 14 days in the unspoiled surroundings of the Sierras, I was really disgusted with what civilization had done to Yosemite Valley.

The place was very crowded, with stores and shops galore. You could get a beauty appointment or buy just about anything you wanted. The whole village seemed totally out of place in the beauty of the granite cliffs.

I walked to the shuttle, went to Curry Village and took a shower. Then I grabbed something to eat, stuck out my thumb, and was back at John's place in Mountainview that evening.