In the early morning of June 9, 1950, I left Pennsylvania State College, headed westward. I had planned the journey all during the summer semester and looked forward to it with excitement.

With little money and much luck I crossed the United States in little more than two weeks, took pictures of the geysers, bears and elk at Yellowstone National Park, passed the big salt desert in Utah and Nevada, and, equipped with diving mask and fish spear hunted goldfish in the Pacific. Then I crossed the continent again, this time starting from the Mexican border to the New England states. I talked to professors and businessmen as well as workers and cowboys, and, on the side, learned to appreciate hot dogs and hamburgers but could not get used to canned beer.

I got started through a lucky coincidence. A group of students from my college who were going to work in the Mountain States during the summer, took me along in their car as far as Yellowstone. After we parted I felt a little funny at first, being all on my own suddenly and standing there in the growing darkness. I looked at my few belongings, a small suitcase and a jungle hammock, and thought over where to spend the first night as it was too cold in the Rocky Mountains to sleep in the open air.

Looking for an unoccupied hut in a log cabin settlement near Old Faithful, the most famous of the Yellowstone Park geysers, I had my first adventure, when I was suddenly confronted with a dark, smacking something which turned out to be a bear sitting on a garbage can and fishing the best pieces out of the cans nearby.

In spite of the comic sight I retreated noiselessly and was glad to soon find an unlocked and unoccupied hut. Searching the room with a flashlight I discovered a stove, a couple of rustic chairs and an uncovered straw bed. A few minutes later I fell asleep, confident of my luck.

Yellowstone is a National Park of approximately 2,213,207 acres and a rare scenic beauty in a primeval forest-like area, almost untouched by civilization, 6,000 to 8,000 feet above sea level with countless geysers, ravines and queer rock formations. Only the highway and a few log cabins reveal man has also invaded this remote forest area to enjoy its loneliness.

A friendly motorist took me through the park the next day and let me admire the beauty of the many different aspects. We passed endless primitive forests lining both sides of the highway; saw a mother bear with her cub in one clearing and in another buffalo and deer grazing peacefully side by side.

We passed the Norris geyser, and I had the impression that the valley was part of a lunar landscape of white rock solidified only recently. Geysers gushed up everywhere. Snow white steam clouds covered the valley and contrasted strangely with the crater lakes matted by seaweed and shining in rainbow colors. The highlight of the day, however, was the visit to the canyon of the
Yellowstone River with its steep yellow rocks, its several waterfalls, and its foam and fogs.

Back at the Old Faithful log cabin village I spent another night, and early the next morning I was on the highway again, my suitcase showing the dark blue school insignias on the top to inform motorists that I was a student of Pennsylvania State College.

**FIRST A MARRIED COUPLE** took me as far as Yellowstone Lake. Then an elderly gentleman going in the direction from which I had come, turned his car around and said he would take me to Jackson where I could catch another ride, and then go back to Chicago. We soon were engaged in a lively conversation on the last war, Hitler's death and present relations between America and Germany. After being invited for a late lunch in Jackson I had to promise my host to visit him in Chicago, and was then left at Jackson.

My hopes to get another ride soon from Jackson to Salt Lake City did not come true. Finally at almost 5 p.m., a big car stopped with a large man behind the wheel who looked at me suspiciously.

"Where are you going?" his first question came grumblingly.

"Down the road."

"Hmm. First time in the state of Wyoming?"

I began to realize that I was talking to a highway policeman and hesitatingly answered his next question as to where I had come from. I told him I had come "down from Yellowstone." His voice then became fatherly mild.

"Sonny, have you never heard that hitchhiking is prohibited in Wyoming?"

Of course, "Sonny" had not and was a little discouraged after the policeman had left with a half serious warning that "actually I should arrest you; however, this time I will let you go. But don't ever let me catch you again."

**AS THERE ARE NEITHER** railroad nor bus lines in those areas I had to try my luck again on the road 10 minutes later, especially as I had based the financial part of my trip on the plan of hitchhiking. An hour later a family from Colorado took me along to Pinedale, where I rented a small room in a "motel" (a word composed of motorist and hotel). It was almost morning when I could go to bed after I had answered the motel owners’ questions concerning my country.

A telegram calling my hosts to Salt Lake City the next day helped me to get there sooner than I had hoped.

Wandering up the hill to the capitol in Salt Lake City the visitor gets a wonderful view of the Mormon capital and the surrounding area. I stayed in the city for several days, visited Temple Square with the huge six-towered granite temple, and admired the old treasures of Mormon tradition at the Temple Museum.

One night, I discussed with a Mormon bishop the Angel Moroni and the Book of Mormon, the content of which Moroni had engraved on golden panels by order of God and more than 1,400 years later had delivered to the first prophet of the Mormon Church.

One of my Mormon acquaintances took me to the world's largest copper mines at Bingham, and then I prepared to cross the big salt desert.

Again this German hitchhiker was standing on the highway and after waiting for transportation for hours in the blazing sun he accepted an invitation to climb into a shaky sort of vehicle which once might have been a car. The top was torn, the windows broken and the upholstery probably had become a victim of the violently gnawing tooth of time. The rear of the vehicle was packed with all kinds of household equipment — plus a baby. In the front were a man and a woman who did not seem to have done much washing on themselves recently, and, pressed there close against the door, was I.

**I ASKED MYSELF** why on earth I had decided to get into this wandering garbage can, particularly with the salt desert ahead, where neither water nor anything else but salt and sand was to be found. My fears, however, proved unjustified. Although we wobbled along incredibly slow the motor never broke down. Once the man poured water into the gear housing, explaining that, although not greasing as well as oil, it still served its purpose for a while and was not as expensive in the first place.

By late afternoon the desert lay behind us. After paying my funny looking travel companions $1 for gasoline I bid them farewell with best wishes for their further trip.

Hardly five minutes later I was picked up by a doctor and his wife from Michigan who were going to San Francisco to attend a medical conference. During the following three days we crossed Nevada, visited the gambling houses at Reno, but did not lose anything as we did not gamble. We saw the little bridge from which the recently divorced couples throw their old wedding rings, and then proceeded to Virginia City, the ghost town.

In the middle of the past century silver was found there, and during the rush which followed a city with opera house, exclusive clubs and countless bars and gambling houses grew out of the stone desert. Hardly any silver is mined there today and of the former 25,000 inhabitants, only 400 remain. Many unoccupied houses, the opera house falling to ruins and the hangman’s cellars which still shows traces of blood (or are they paint?) are left of Virginia City’s great past.

That night I hung up my hammock between two gnarled fir trees on the bank of Lake Tahoe, and while the sun disappeared behind the Sierra Nevada Mountains the splash of the water lulled me to sleep.

**IN SAN FRANCISCO** I lived in a hotel for a change as the guest of my newly found friends. They actually talked me into the invitation and even apologized for having so little time for me because of the conference. Between a rich breakfast and even more abundant dinner, I went sightseeing. I visited Golden Gate Park, strolled across the Golden Gate Bridge and inspected the
Steinhart Aquarium and the De Young Museum since one must do something for his education too.

But nothing lasts for ever, and so I had to leave my kind hosts and San Francisco. I had expected to arrive in Los Angeles the same day; however, I had not counted on meeting a forester at Salinas who, when he heard I came from Germany, invited me to stay with him for at least one day, especially since that week Salinas was to stage its big rodeo.

The rodeo is a cowboy festival to maintain the Wild-West tradition, with emphasis on “wild.” First, from a seat in an arena we watched the entrance of 900 horsemen. Then the events started rather suddenly.

In the beginning, the cowboys had to ride for 20 seconds on horses jumping and dancing wildly through the arena. The same thing was shown a little later with Brahma bulls. Quite a few landed in the sand and often it seemed a miracle that even during the most dangerous falls the tough boys remained unhurt. Sometime later the announcer asserted that there is only one way to knock a cowboy out and that is to cut off his head and hide it. This, however, proved a little exaggerated as the show continued. Three broken arms were registered in the end, and one of the fellows had to be carried off the field after being thrown by a bull.

A LITTLE LATER some steers grown up wild on the range were let into the arena. Pairs of cowboys each had to get a steer between them. Then one of them threw a lasso over the steer’s horns and the other around its hind legs. To accomplish this it took the best pair 11 seconds. Three seconds is the world record.

Then from a wooden box wild calves were let out into the arena. The little beasts were so fast that often the horses of the cowboys had some difficulty in catching up with them. The calves had to be caught by lasso and all four legs roped together.

The wildest show, however, was still to come. Again several steers were let out of their box while at the same time two cowboys on horseback entered through a door nearby. As soon as they got one steer between them the one on the right jumped off his horse, while jumping grabbed the steer by its horns, brought it to a stop and threw it. Many accomplished the trick, but I just could not understand how they did it.

A roar of laughter was caused by the last presentation, the milking of wild cows. The cowboys had to show the referee at least one drop of milk in a small bottle to prove that they had really caught and milked a cow. Breathlessly one of them ran up to the referee. The referee looked at the bottle, then scanned it again but could not find any milk. “Certainly had some in it,” grumbled the boy. “Must have evaporated in the meantime.”

THREE SHORTER TRIPS the next day took me to Los Angeles.

Already before I arrived there I was a little prejudiced against this fast grown city with its oil fields stretching into the housing area. Therefore I only stayed one day.

I walked to Olvera Street, the “little Mexico” in California, looked at the colorful, woven rugs, tried a wide-brimmed sombrero and enjoyed looking at a hundred small things offered for sale as souvenirs by dark-skinned, black-haired Mexicans. In the afternoon I wandered through the wide halls of the mausoleum (Forest Lawn), which almost reminded me of an Arabian fairy tale because of its white pointed towers. In the evening I went to Hollywood. However, I did not have any exciting experiences.

The next morning I had to wait three hours before I got a ride in the car of a Mr. B. I soon felt as if we had been friends for a long time. Hardly five minutes after he had picked me up, we were talking in that slightly sneering or scoffing manner in which American friends often converse, while he drove through the dark green orange and lemon groves to San Diego.

For two weeks I was the guest of the family B. As a businessman Mr. B. did a lot of traveling and took me along. So I got to see southern California. Mr. B. aside from his business always took the time to show me something interesting, for instance, a particularly interesting movie at a drive-in theater, or an operetta performance in an open-air theater on a full-moon night under palm and eucalyptus trees.

One day we went to Lake Wood City. A series of 300 houses per day was being produced there in a conveyer belt-like process, and in two or three months the construction of Lake Wood City was expected to be completed with 17,000 houses and 100,000 inhabitants.

TIME WAS FLYING, and when I had departed and gone through the mountains to El Centro, I had to think of these kind people time and again. Mr. B. had been a soldier during the past war as well as I, but it took only a few hours to make us real friends.

After a fast crossing of the Yuma Desert near the Mexican border I stayed a couple of hours in Phoenix, and reached the Grand Canyon in Arizona without difficulty. There the Colorado River has dug a huge gorge 217 miles long, four to 18 miles wide and 4,000 to 5,500 feet deep into the red rock, the impressive massiveness of which can hardly be surpassed.

At the Grand Canyon I had already seen crowds of Indians. However, not before I arrived at the little town of Gallup in New Mexico did I see the type of red man still alive in my memory from reading the Karl May travel books.*

Clad in picturesque costumes, Indian horseback riders trotted to meeting at the outskirts of the town. The war-like picture was a little spoiled, though, by the iron-rimmed eyeglasses some of the members of “Winnetou’s” and “Sitting Bull’s” race wore on their aquiline noses.

It was in Gallup, too, that I met Daddy Thiemann. With little speed his ancient motor car came wobbling down

* Karl May, well-known German author of numerous books on travel through various countries, wrote lively descriptions of North-American Indian tribes using the names “Winnetou” and “Sitting Bull” for his most outstanding Indian heroes.
IN BIG JUMPS I went through Texas to Oklahoma City. There I picked up by a large black automobile with a little gray-haired man behind the wheel, of whom I never learned more than that his name was Tom. While the car raced down the highway at 100 miles an hour, he kept questioning me: "Where are you going?"

"Trying to get to New York via St. Louis and Chicago." "Where do you come from?" "Pennsylvania via Yellowstone and California."

"You seem to be a devil of a fellow. I'll help you along a little."

All during the 338 miles from Oklahoma City to St. Louis, both of us endeavored to find out which country had done more for the progress of mankind, America or Germany. Tom, of course, was deeply convinced that Germany could not compete with America at all, while I argued most forcibly that everything good had come from Germany. In St. Louis he reached out his hand to me for a farewell and, while starting the car, he called, "Goodbye, old Dutchman. Take care of yourself." Only when he had gone was I able to look at the little wad of paper he had left in my hand. It was a $50 bill.

THE NEXT TWO DAYS I stayed with newly-won friends in Peoria, Ill. I visited Keystone, America's largest wire-netting factory and the Caterpillar diesel tractor plant. Next morning I called upon my friend of Chicago, whom I had first met between Yellowstone and Jackson.

We went sightseeing by car in America's second largest city, visited the university, where the preliminary work on the atom bomb had been done, the library, the world-famous stockyards and, of course, a few parks. At night we looked from the shore of Lake Michigan at the silhouette of the city, multicolored by neon lights.

That great a number of different signs and advertising posters appear to European eyes as a symbol of the tough competition which stands as a mighty driving force behind the American economy. The largest advertising sign in Chicago is 355 feet high and its light reaches far across the city.

After traveling week after week and covering thousands of miles, one gets restless, at least, I did. I could not stay long anywhere, and as soon as I had seen what I wanted to see I went on. So I started out for a new place.

So the next day I left for Detroit, where I visited the Ford plant. A teacher and his wife took me through Canada to Buffalo.

Together with a friend from Penn State, who lived in Buffalo, I visited Niagara Falls, went swimming in the Niagara River all afternoon, and at night looked again from the Canadian side at the falls, which were illuminated with floodlights in rainbow colors.

NEW YORK, THE JOURNEY's end, was easily reached from Buffalo in one day. There, too, I was lucky enough to get a good ride quickly.

Again the rolling wheels sang the endless song of the road and once more, completely relaxed, I could enjoy the good feeling of traveling.

But while outside the green meadows and blue lakes of the New England states went by, my thoughts wandered back to all those friendly and helpful people whom I as a German student in a foreign country had found, and I was deeply grateful.