

Dear Reader,

Let me tell you about a travelling light and carefree time – when we were tramps. That doesn't mean we were tramps, but tramping lorry drivers. Drivers who would roam from place to place, criss-crossing the length and breadth of the country. The aim was to keep the lorry laden and earning money from the payloads that we could locate. Each driver had his own carefully guarded book with the contact details of favourite clearing houses and haulage contractors, and some of us had company or factory contacts that would favour us with profitable loads. There was a time in the 50s and 60s when it was economical & profitable to work in this way. It wouldn't work now!

We would set off with a load from our own area,² with not much more than a grip-bag containing a change of clothes, several pairs of underpants and a bag of toiletries. We might be away a week or sometimes much longer. Does that sound like travelling light?

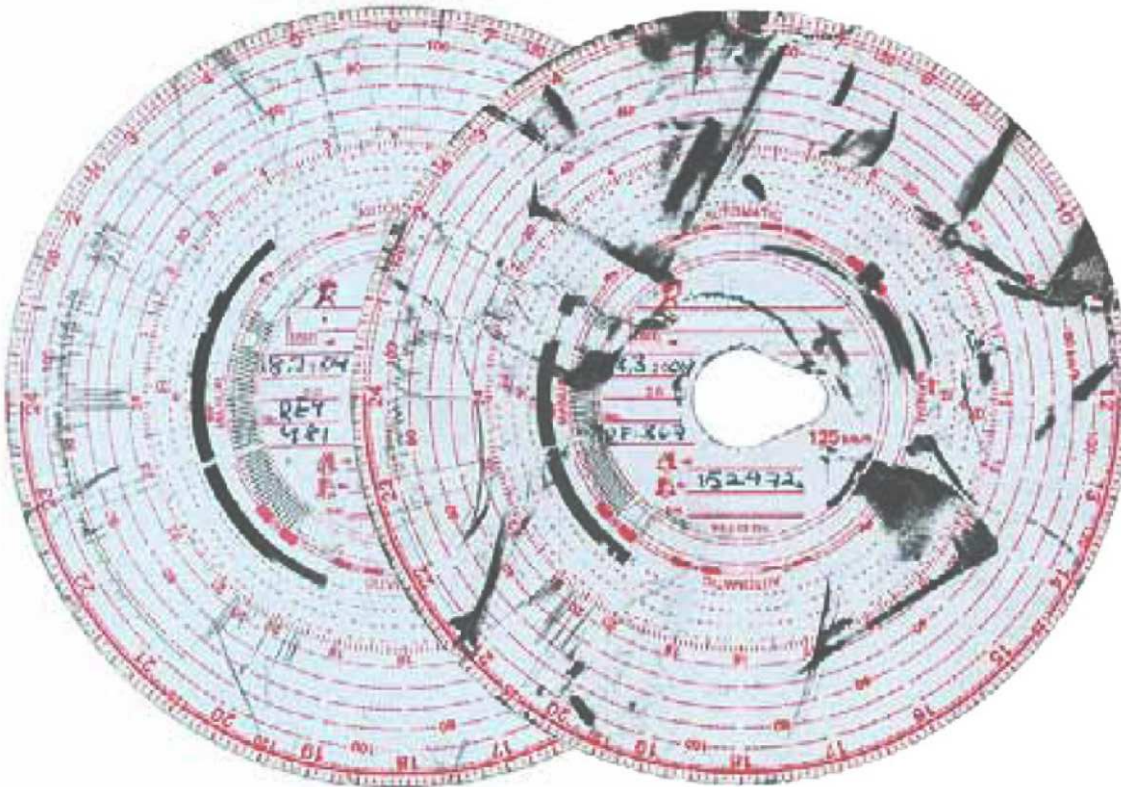
I know one tramp who carried almost nothing with him except a bar of soap wrapped in newspaper. That was exceptionally light, and a little unhygienic. Especially as he rarely used the soap!

We often started off with fruit to various fruit markets, canned goods from local factories, timber, or imported goods from the docks. Once away, we carried everything imaginable – machinery, more timber, tractors, building materials, paving slabs, salt. The list is endless. You name it – we carried it.

If we didn't immediately find a load towards home, we would load for somewhere where we stood a reasonable chance of loading for home. Doing a three-cornered trip, or four-cornered or five. It was all fun. So much responsibility was left to us as drivers – it was as if we were our own bosses. I remember when a fellow driver from the same firm was asked what kind of haulage we did – he simply said 'we go all over'.

It was about half a century ago, but it was the job I most enjoyed in my entire working life.

Regards,
Mick Harrod¹



Notes:

¹ We asked Mick Harrod for a short biography, and he sent us the following, which prompted us to recalibrate our notion of a fully lived life:

'I hardly ever write a letter in longhand any more, in common with most people. There was a time when I did, and when I was about sixteen and working on a farm, I used to write short news items for a couple of agricultural magazines and other specialist publications. Often, I would be rewarded with a half-crown payment.

Then I began working at all kinds of jobs – mostly the jobs that called for long and varied hours and I had no time for such frivolities as writing until just before retirement. My occupations were legion, and at a risk of boring you, I will list some. There are many others. I worked on the farm, then as a van driver and then lorry driver for a fruiterer hauling fruit and veg from Spitalfields and Covent Garden to Lowestoft, where I was, and still am, based. National Service came along and I did scores of different jobs in the Army.

Later I drove for every haulier in town, was a postman, had scores of building jobs including pile-driving, worked as a laminator and then as a haulage shunter, yard foreman, manager and own account haulier. Between all this, I went to sea as a herring drifter man and a trawler man before signing on as a deckhand on a cargo ship. Have also worked for Nestlé's milk company in Aylesbury, and Maggi Soups as well as spending quite a time in the brickyards of London Brick Company.

I ended up as a non-ferrous scrap metal dealer. The oddest job I ever did was when I joined a travelling circus, and among my many duties I entertained the crowds as the front half of a performing cow.

Currently, I am the local correspondent for a commercial fishing publication and have written for many magazines.'

² Lowestoft is the easternmost town in the United Kingdom. A fishing port and industrial centre, readers of WG Sebald will know of the town as his first night's residence in *The Rings of Saturn*. When he (or his narrator) ate dinner at his hotel, he was the sole guest in the huge dining room, and the prongs of his fork bent on the breadcrumb armour-plating of the fish that had doubtless lain entombed in the deepfreeze for years. In the morning he left promptly, and headed south along the coast towards Southwold and Dunwich.

3. The tachograph image here is by Onnettomuustutkintakeskus, Helsinki, Esko Lähteenmäki, Chair of commission [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons. We are of course aware that the lorry driving career here described by Mick predates the introduction of tachograph technology, or indeed of any restrictions on working hours. (On the subject of long working hours, one of our editors recalls hitching a lift with a lorry driver, towards the end of the last century, who extolled the virtues of the 'hand-breeze-deflection' technique, whereby an angled hand held outside the open window would deflect a breeze into the driver's face. Upon falling asleep, the hand would fall, thus waking the driver. The system was fool-proof, he insisted. Our intrepid hitchhiker stopped off at the next services, leaving the lorry driver to weave one-handedly down the motorway.)

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