

Transience, Labor, and Nature: Itinerant Workers in the American West

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Abstract

This article focuses on the tens of thousands of itinerant workers, also known as tramps or hoboos, who provided the primary labor force for the natural resource extraction industries of the American West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Itinerant workers' visceral encounters with nature differed from the experiences of most urban residents in this era of city growth and related anxiety about Americans' loss of contact with the natural world. This article argues that some hoboos embraced time spent in "wild" nature as an escape from work, and they consciously asserted their ability to appreciate nature in the face of claims that such appreciation was class-specific. As workers and as travelers, itinerant laborers experienced and knew nature in ways that reflected both their distinct circumstances as mobile industrial wage workers and the cultural context of a national obsession with nonhuman nature.

In 1914, the International Workers of the World (IWW) journal, *Solidarity*, referred to the itinerant workers of the West as "half industrial slave, half vagabond adventurer." This description continues to ring true a century later.¹ Itinerant laborers were essential to the industrial capitalism that characterized the American economy between the Civil War and the 1920s. They were particularly important in the West, where they provided the labor for the region's natural resource extraction industries and constructed much of the infrastructure necessary to exploit those resources. Jobs in these industries—including agriculture, mining, logging, construction, fishing, and cannery work—were irregular and seasonal, and they demanded a mobile workforce. During these decades, periodic recessions and volatile western labor markets forced men to travel widely in search of work. In 1910, there were an estimated 3.5 million itinerant workers in the United States, and California alone was home to some 175,000 such casual workers.² These men were known by a variety of terms including tramps, hoboos, bindle-stiffs, and floaters. Despite their essential economic roles, they were widely scorned as the lowest of workers, and vagrancy laws criminalized much of the mobility that their jobs demanded.

The seasonal nature of resource extraction industries meant that workers congregated in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and other western cities during winter months of low employment. As seasonal urban residents, itinerant workers linked western cities to the regional extractive industries that supported those cities both ecologically and economically. As environmental historian David Iglar has written, workers in resource extraction industries "understood not only the relationship between labor and capital but also the connections

between hinterland production and city markets.”³ They understood these relationships because they lived them, traveling between countryside and city, from a job picking fruit or cutting down trees to another at a cannery or construction site. Integrating the stories of the resource networks that supported western cities and the working people whose labor drove resource exploitation, and with it both urban growth and trade, expands on William Cronon’s analysis in *Nature’s Metropolis* by uncovering the human experience of workers who labored in industries that linked city and countryside.⁴

In both their work and their travel, these itinerant workers viscerally experienced outdoor living and the vagaries of climate during an era when the country was becoming increasingly urban and industrial. As middle- and upper-class Americans worried about a loss of contact with nature, itinerant laborers remained well aware that their lives were embedded in nature, for better or worse. As Nels Anderson, a hobo turned sociologist, succinctly explained, “life and work in the open, so conducive to health on bright, warm days, involves exposure in cold and stormy weather.”⁵ As Anderson suggested, to describe the lives of migrant laborers as close to nature is not to romanticize them. Most hoboes experienced privation, hardship, uncertainty, and danger, and this set them apart from participants in the “back to nature” movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the United States.⁶ However, Anderson’s reference to the health benefits of time spent outdoors reflected part of the mindset behind such movements, and the contradictions in his phrasing suggest that hoboes’ encounters with nature were anything but simple. I argue that at least some hoboes embraced time spent in “wild” nature as an escape from work, and they consciously asserted their ability to appreciate nature in the face of claims that such appreciation was class specific. As workers and as travelers, itinerant laborers experienced and knew nature in ways that reflected both their distinct circumstances as mobile industrial wage workers and the cultural context of a national obsession with nonhuman nature.

California—home to the West’s greatest urban centers, its most substantial industrial development, and its most intensive agriculture—occupies the center of this story. The attractions of California’s jobs and cities made the state the major hub for western itinerant laborers, but their mobility meant that they crossed state (and regional) boundaries on a regular basis. This article will follow its subjects to the forests and fields of the Pacific Northwest and the mines of the Rockies. As an increasingly urban and industrial place, California exemplified trends shaping development throughout the region, and the Golden State thus represents an appropriate center point for this analysis of itinerant laborers’ relationship to nature.

Temporally, this article focuses on the decades from 1890 to 1920. The depression of 1893 left thousands of men out of work in San Francisco and other western cities. Desperate, they sought any available work in the countryside, increasing the flow of workers between city and country and taking advantage of the region’s rapidly expanding rail network to chase employment wherever they could find it. The hard times of the 1890s also sparked new

political mobilizations among the unemployed, including a march from California to Washington by 1,500 men calling themselves the Industrial Army of the Unemployed (and including a young tramp named Jack London).⁷ Political mobilizations incorporating itinerant laborers remained sporadic and largely confined to particular industries such as mining until the IWW, founded in 1905, turned its attention to organizing unskilled laborers in the West. Although the Wobblies' efforts to organize migratory laborers seemed to be making progress over the next decade, the onset of the First World War led to a crackdown on radicalism that brought an abrupt end to the heyday of the IWW. Other changes in the aftermath of the war and in the 1920s altered the social and economic circumstances of workers in resource extraction industries. Agriculture employed growing numbers of migrants from Mexico, displacing the hoboes who had worked on the harvest in California and throughout the West. The increasing affordability of the automobile transformed the mobility of workers in pursuit of both employment and recreation. Thus, the decades from roughly 1890 to 1920 represented a distinct period in which hoboes played a crucial part in the extractive economy of the American West while developing a unique, oppositional subculture.

That colorful subculture of hoboes has sparked a number of recent histories. Among the most notable, Todd DePastino's *Citizen Hobo* situates the hobo in a longer social and cultural history of homelessness in the United States. Frank Tobias Higbie's *Indispensable Outcasts* focuses on migrant workers in the Midwest as central to progressive era debates over economic and cultural changes. He explores the shifting social meanings of seasonal labor and how laborers negotiated tensions over class, citizenship, and manhood. Mark Wyman's *Hoboes* analyzes harvest workers in the West from the 1870s to the 1920s as central to the development of agriculture in the region.⁸ The IWW and its attempts to organize migratory laborers have also been the focus of a number of works by labor historians, who have recounted the dramatic battles over free speech and working conditions in western towns like Wheatland, Everett, and Butte and placed them in the contexts of western economic development and American radicalism. However, despite the number of works that consider the history of the West's itinerant laborers during this period, none has employed an environmental history analysis to focus on their relationship to nature.⁹

Environmental historians have increasingly foregrounded the experiences of non-elites and challenged an earlier narrative that situated working-class people in opposition to changing environmental consciousness in the modern United States. In 1976, Roderick Nash wrote, "All the nineteenth-century champions of wilderness appreciation ... were products of either urban Eastern situations or of one of the West's most sophisticated cities, such as San Francisco. Lumbermen, miners, and professional hunters ... lived too close to nature to appreciate it for other than its economic value as raw material."¹⁰ This dichotomy between elites who appreciated wilderness and workers who saw natural resources only in economic terms oversimplified the views of both groups.

More recent histories of both urban workers and rural people emphasize the contradictions within conservation. For example, Chad Montrie's *Making a Living* and Lawrence Lipin's *Workers and the Wild* explore the complex ways in which working-class Americans related to nature as industrial capitalism transformed their work lives and material circumstances. Karl Jacoby's *Crimes Against Nature* considers how local people who lived within or near newly established parks, including Native Americans and white hunters, conceptualized nature and their labor in it. In *Common Lands, Common People*, Richard Judd traces the influence of rural New Englanders on conservationist thinking, showing how conservation drew on eclectic, grass-roots elements as well as the elite and scientific discourses highlighted by most histories of the movement.¹¹

These historians are among several who have answered Richard White's call for environmental historians to "reexamine the connections between work and nature." White analyzes how modern environmentalism distinguishes between leisure and work as ways of encountering nature, writing that, "Environmentalists stress the eye over the hand, the contemplative over the active, the supposedly undisturbed over the connected." In contrast, he argues that humans have historically known and understood nature through their labor. In *The Organic Machine*, White defines human labor in terms of energy, thereby emphasizing how all human activity is part of nature.¹² However, as Gunther Peck has noted, in blurring the boundaries between work and play, White's broad definition of human labor obscures political differences between the two.¹³ In his study of miners in Colorado, *Killing for Coal*, Thomas Andrews shows how their "workscape," which encompassed both material realities and cultural perceptions, shaped the "lived experience, identity, and politics" of mineworkers and demonstrated the impossibility of separating nature and culture.¹⁴ Kathryn Morse's *The Nature of Gold* argues that Klondike gold miners remained embedded in the industrial society that facilitated their explorations even as they moved between "a fierce, physical, seemingly preindustrial engagement" with the natural world and the mediated, hidden connections characteristic of modern, industrial society. These and other histories have begun to uncover the complex ways in which labor both shaped and was shaped by natural and cultural contexts.¹⁵

This study of itinerant laborers adds another layer to environmental historians' efforts to elucidate working-class attitudes toward nature and historical relationships between nature and labor. Both Jacoby's and Judd's subjects were defined in part by their rootedness in place (whether real or imagined). In contrast, itinerant laborers defy attempts to classify them. They possessed a degree of mobility usually associated with modernity while remaining tied to work in nature and its cycles of seasonal change in ways usually associated with preindustrial labor. Itinerant laborers also moved constantly between rural and urban settings, making them impossible to categorize as residents of one or the other. Finally, hoboes worked largely outside the purview of organized labor, and their use of nature as a site of recreation predated the

growing popularity of working-class outdoor recreation movements beginning in the 1920s.¹⁶

Itinerant laborers clearly distinguished between work and other exertions of energy, such as walking through the landscape or “beating” a train. Work involved a loss of independence, whereas leaving a job, choosing one’s next destination, and even the process of getting there represented an assertion of agency and, often, a challenge to the norms of industrial capitalism. The freedom of traveling through nature, even with its hardships, displaced work as the focus of narratives, and descriptions in itinerants’ writings reflected an appreciation of nature for its beauty and as an alternative to work.

In short, itinerant laborers reflected and represented many of the contradictions of this transitional period of both industrialization and changing ideas about the natural environment. In a single year (perhaps even in a single week or month), a hobo was an urban dweller, a rural worker, and a traveler, a laborer and a man of both poverty and leisure. He experienced the worst squalor of city living. He pitted his muscle and will against nature to extract its resources, well aware that in doing so he contributed far more to the wealth of others than to his own prosperity. And he traveled through nature in all its harshness and beauty. Itinerant workers did know nature through their labor, but they also appreciated the beauty of nature as observers. As IWW songwriter Dick Brazier said of life as a western hobo,

There was plenty of room to move around in, and there were scenes of great grandeur and beauty, and there were journeys to be made that took you to all kinds of interesting sections of the country. ... I think that’s one of the reasons we kept on moving as much as we did. In addition to searching for the job, we were also searching for something to satisfy our emotional desire for grandeur and beauty. After all, we have a concept of beauty too, although we were only migratory workers.¹⁷

Itinerant laborers like Brazier drew clear distinctions between leisure and work, and they claimed a right of leisure time and space for themselves, using natural places and cities as sites of both work and recreation. Rather than slot nature into one category or the other, they accepted the presence of nature within both spheres, and they used both hand and eye to know nature.

Hobo Literature and Labels

One of the difficulties in studying the history of working-class people in general and itinerant laborers in particular is, of course, the limits of available sources. First-hand accounts by hoboes and men who worked in resource extraction industries include memoirs, oral histories, and fictionalized narratives. Tramps were storytellers, and some used print to formalize the tales that they told when begging for charity or whiling away the hours in a railroad car. As the historian Ann Fabian notes of other working-class “true stories,” the accounts of

hoboes bore witness to the authors' experiences. Tramp writers described and commented on the economic conditions that they experienced, and they claimed authority, as well as a little cash, for themselves in the process. Such sources must, of course, be recognized as narratives constructed with audience reactions in mind. Tramp narratives often followed traditions of picaresque fiction and tales of the open road. They also embraced prevailing narratives of the conquest of the West and the closing of the frontier. But even when mediated through literary conventions, first-hand accounts convey some of the lived experiences of hoboes, and they reveal how these outsiders engaged with the cultural norms of the period, sometimes conforming to them and sometimes challenging them.¹⁸

Political statements by and about itinerant laborers were published in pamphlet form and appeared in labor newspapers during this era. These sources often describe working and living conditions, and they also offer a window into the political ideas of itinerant workers, particularly as the IWW became increasingly active organizing western workers after 1906. All writings by and about hoboes, not just those that appear explicitly political, were filtered through a lens of class analysis and critique. Both as flesh-and-blood individuals and as cultural symbols, tramps and hoboes were at the center of attempts to come to terms with the class divisions of American society in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.

These attempts included a number of studies by social scientists and reformers attempting to understand problems of unemployment and homelessness. Although the biases of the men and women conducting them inevitably shaped these studies, they nevertheless provide useful information about populations of itinerant and unemployed men. Some men conducted "participant-observer" studies in which they joined the laboring classes, either out of youthful curiosity, as in the case of Walter A. Wyckoff, or as part of an organized investigation, as with F.C. Mills. These men shared many of the experiences of itinerant laborers during their investigations, and they also described their observations of the men with whom they interacted at work and on the road.¹⁹ Although all of these sources have limitations, together they provide a window into the lives of itinerant laborers during these decades.

Hoboes were almost entirely male and primarily white, although in some industries in the West they found themselves working alongside people of Mexican, Chinese, Japanese, East Indian, or Native American descent.²⁰ A 1913–1914 study of migratory farm laborers in California found that half were natives of the United States and half were foreign-born immigrants, and other studies of vagrants generally agreed that at least half were native-born Americans. They came from a wide variety of backgrounds, and almost all were literate, although the percentage with college educations was low.²¹ Many accounts describe itinerant workers as avid readers of both local newspapers and labor publications. IWW halls contained extensive libraries, and radical bookstores also circulated literature among hoboes. Jack London's writings were particularly popular, and in the early twentieth century his *Call of the*

Wild and *White Fang* contributed to an explosion of wilderness novels on national bestseller lists.²² As their literary interests suggest, tramps who wrote about their experiences were outliers, but they were not as far removed from the majority of the itinerant population as one might expect. The hobo subculture was oppositional, but it was not disengaged from prevailing cultural trends and debates in the United States, including those about nature.

The anarchist and hobo Ben Reitman famously said, “The hobo works and wanders, the tramp dreams and wanders, and the bum drinks and wanders.”²³ Both outsiders studying itinerant laborers and the men themselves were very much concerned with labeling and classifying unemployed men and wanderers. Tramp subculture incorporated distinct labels based on factors such as age, experience, and work habits. For example, in the West, the term “bindle-stiff” referred specifically to a working tramp, a man who moved around the region from job to job carrying his role of blankets on his back. However, many observers noted the difficulty of distinguishing between those who were down-and-out because of economic or seasonal cycles and tramps who they saw as a criminal element. As the social reformer Edmond Kelly put it in 1908, “the question of the tramp cannot be separated from that of the unemployed for vicious tramps often masquerade as unemployed and innocent unemployed after a few weeks’ tramping cannot be distinguished from tramps.”²⁴ The confusion inherent in Kelly’s statement reflected the difficulty of labeling men with complex motivations and personal histories.

In fact, these categories of men overlapped greatly and their shared characteristics outweighed their differences. The line between “skilled” and “unskilled” laborers, both in cities and in rural resource extraction industries, was fluid. Men went where the jobs were (or tried to), and most had no qualms about claiming to possess the necessary skills to fill any decent, available job. Periods of unemployment based on seasonal and economic cycles characterized the experiences of many, if not most, working-class people in the West during these decades. Not only were agriculture, mining, timber, and fishing seasonal, but urban industries also operated seasonally, leaving tens of thousands of men and women unemployed through the winter months. For example, in San Francisco, industrial employers routinely cut their work forces by one-fourth during the months of January through March.²⁵ Even skilled laborers, such as carpenters, regularly found themselves without work in their trades and joined the pool of unskilled laborers to make ends meet. Recurrent recessions exacerbated these conditions for workers of all kinds.²⁶ In fact, the precarious nature of the division between respectable workers and itinerants scorned for their inability to find steady work helps explain the concern with defining and categorizing the unemployed and homeless. This emphasis on self or group differentiation reflected the permeability of boundaries within the working classes. The transience and uncertainty that characterized the lives of itinerant laborers was all too familiar to more respectable working-class Americans, and this only made hoboes and the marginal status they represented more threatening.

The term “tramp” possessed intriguing multiple meanings during this period, even as it competed with other terms such as “hobo” as the label of choice. As DePastino notes, the term “tramping” once referenced the travels of a journeyman from job to job as he gained experience in his chosen trade.²⁷ The term also continued to denote a trip to and through natural areas for leisure purposes. In the 1880s, a group of well-off Oakland residents called the Merry Tramps engaged in recreational camping trips around the Bay Area. In this era of “back to nature” movements and recreational sojourns to view sublime nature or engage in big-game hunting, the Merry Tramps joined many groups and individuals, such as John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt, in promoting travel to “wild” nature. Thomas Dykes Beasley, who walked across California mining country in 1914 for reasons of leisure and literature, not only referred to both himself and his trip by the term “tramp” but also expressed sympathy and fellowship with hoboes whom he encountered. Even Muir used the term, reflecting that he “chose to become a tramp” rather than pursue wealth in a more settled occupation than that of wilderness advocate.²⁸ The multiple meanings of “tramp” from vagrant to walking excursion coexisted from at least the late eighteenth century into the late nineteenth and early twentieth.²⁹ The interplay of concepts of travel, work, leisure, and nature in the multiple meanings of the term reflects the complexity of the ways in which itinerant laborers in the American West perceived and experienced their place in the region’s environment, economy, and culture.

Motivations for Tramping

Both observers of itinerant workers and hobo authors themselves debated the primary factor motivating their mobility. Economic circumstances certainly played a major role. For example, F.C. Mills noted that “the whip of economic necessity” was far more important than “love of adventure.”³⁰ However, writings of and about tramps often emphasized psychological motivations, rather than economic ones. The concept of “Wanderlust,” often capitalized as though it were a force beyond conscious control, appeared repeatedly. Wanderlust was sometimes seen as a psychological flaw—the social reformer Alice Solenberger referred to extreme cases as “half insane victims of restlessness”—and sometimes as a natural drive tied to the seasons. Andress Floyd wrote of how “the Spirit of Wanderlust seizes all the World in the early days of Spring” and compared hoboes taking to the road to both millionaires moving to their country homes and the spring migrations of robins.³¹ These discussions revealed a tension over whether a desire to wander, with its rejection of a stable home life anchored in a single place, represented an illness that needed to be eradicated or an instinct that was a “natural” response, either a drive that existed within all people or an understandable adaptation to economic conditions.

Some hoboes identified their motivation as a love of the road and a need for variety, and they connected these impulses implicitly or explicitly to a

desire to explore and experience nature. Leon Ray Livingston, who published a dozen books about his life as tramp A-No. 1, wrote of how “Scenery Tramps” were “absolutely restless” men who “crave[d] only a constant change of scenery.” Similarly, Beasley emphasized that “sheer love of the road—and only a tramp knows what those words mean” kept men moving, and he linked that desire for travel to an appreciation for “the beauty of Nature” that not all people possessed.³² In their 1918 study of farm labor in California, the reformers R.L. Adams and T.R. Kelly observed, “The average worker aims to enjoy life. He goes to the redwoods, in the high Sierras, and to the coast during the heat of summer, he travels to southern California for the rainy season.” They explicitly noted that itinerants made choices about where to travel and where to seek work, based on knowledge of both employment opportunities and environmental conditions.³³

Restlessness or wanderlust could also represent a proletarian’s rejection of the drudgery of work. Beasley referred to the hobo as “an idealist” who sought “freedom from the shackles of convention and the ‘Gradgrind’ methods of an utilitarian and materialistic age.”³⁴ Both specific working conditions and the general characteristics of labor for unskilled men were often cited as reasons why itinerant laborers rejected steady employment. Jack London described such motivation in his own experience of going “on the road” as a teenager. He became a tramp because of “the wanderlust in my blood that would not let me rest” but also “because I hadn’t the price of the railroad fare in my jeans” and “because I was so made that I couldn’t work all my life on ‘one same shift.’” For London, like many hoboes, the desire to travel and the quest for diverse experiences combined with the economic circumstances of poverty and the monotony of available work to draw him into tramp life.³⁵

Walter Wyckoff, who in contrast to London presented himself as a worker rather than a hobo during his stint on the road, also emphasized the appeal of variety. After a forty mile walk one day, he wrote, “Setting down to work would now be a welcome change ... just as I always found the life of the road a grateful relief, at first, from the strain of heavy labor.”³⁶ Wyckoff’s pattern of mixing intervals of travel, work, and unemployment was typical of itinerant laborers in this era. Often the end of a job or the inability to secure one forced this mobility, but laborers also chose to move on from a job or place. Men remained employed with the Southern Pacific an average of only 8.6 days, and one study of railroad construction found 75 percent turnover every ten days. On average, harvesters worked for only seven days before collecting their pay and moving on, canners for thirty days, and miners for sixty days. Carleton Parker found that 73 percent of the men he surveyed reported that their last job had been in a different locality, 21 percent of them in another state. Just over one-third of workers had left voluntarily.³⁷

Hoboes were not alone among working-class men in seeking alternatives to the monotony of wage labor during this era. Jacoby describes how poachers in the Yellowstone area in the early twentieth century contrasted the relative freedom and independence of poaching with “the dependency and time

discipline of the workplace.” They perceived poaching and work as opposing categories despite the fact that poaching required physical effort and served as a source of income.³⁸ Native Americans throughout the West and Mexican Americans in the Southwest also practiced irregular participation in wage labor, incorporating it into older subsistence cycles that entailed seasonal mobility.³⁹ Elsewhere in the country, Montrie found a similar pattern of selective participation in wage labor among Appalachian miner-farmers, as well as resistance to labor through “vagrancy” on the part of African-Americans in the South.⁴⁰ Thus, itinerant laborers were by no means unique in their rejection of consistent employment for wages, but their cultural visibility and their status as white men caused their departure from American norms to stand out. Hoboes’ travel became both a means of escape and a transgression against settled community life and work norms. That travel also took them out of cities and rural settlements and into closer contact with first nature.

Traveling Through Nature

Itinerants’ descriptions of life on the road combined elements of hardship, adventure, and leisure. Livingston opened his 1910 *Life and Adventures of A-No. 1* with a warning addressed to “every young man and boy” who might be attracted by his adventures. He wrote, “For each mile of beautiful scenery and food in plenty, there are many weary miles of hard walking with no food or even water—through mountain gorges and over parched deserts; for each warm summer night, there are ten bitter-cold, long winter nights.”⁴¹ This disclaimer served to reassure respectable readers that Livingston did not intend to recruit boys to tramp life, but it also highlighted the role that nature played in the narrative, both as scenery and as the source of hardship and challenges. Nature—the weather, the land, the availability of food and fuel—shaped the experiences of itinerant workers, particularly when they were on the move.

Tramp narratives often emphasized the hardships and difficulties of traveling through the landscape, removed from the comforts of civilization. London described a winter trip through the Nevada desert:

Snow lay here and there on the level, all the mountains were shrouded in white, and at night the most miserable wind imaginable blew off from them. It was not a land in which to linger. And remember, gentle reader, the hobo goes through such a land, without shelter, without money, ... and sleeping at night without blankets.⁴²

This was not a landscape of leisure and recreation. The descriptions of scenery were balanced with “the most miserable wind,” and the hobo lacked even the most basic protections against the harshness of the winter environment. Both while traveling and while sojourning in “jungles”—the telling term for the gatherings of hoboes that developed in cities and near railroad depots—itinerant laborers often slept on the ground with at best a thin blanket to insulate them

from the elements. As the self-described tramp Andrew Saunders wrote, "When you read a poet yearning to go back to the Simple Life and live close to Nature, sleeping on the ground as did the simple shepherds in the days of old, you can gamble he was never on the hobo."⁴³ With these words, Saunders challenged nature writers who promoted the "simple life" with no recognition of its hardships. American culture, however, also provided tramps with a way to assign value to their rough encounters with nature. Negotiating hardships enhanced strength and vitality, granted virtue, and reinforced masculinity and independence even as the experience of industrial wage labor undermined those characteristics. Prevailing ideas about nature thus appealed to hoboes even as they questioned the wisdom of nature's "poets."

Traveling hoboes took advantage of any available resources. During a trip through the Santa Clara Valley in the mid-1890s, the socialist Morrison I. Swift described how "along every country road, under almost every tree ... there were the ashes of little camp fires where food was heated, and the banks of every stream appeared like a much-used lodging house."⁴⁴ The hobo A.W. Dragostedt also emphasized the importance of nearby natural resources, describing a jungle located "on the edge of a strip of timber" where "a stream fed from a spring runs into the lake nearby."⁴⁵ Hoboes obtained food by hunting, fishing, or stealing from orchards (as well as begging), and they gathered fuel from forests. Irving Hanson remembered "liv[ing] off rabbits, thanks to our .22 rifle," when he and a friend struggled to find work as miners in 1912.⁴⁶ A tree, a haystack, or any unoccupied structure could provide shelter for hoboes on the move. But itinerant laborers could never truly escape the industrial world, of course. Even when their meals consisted of animals that they had hunted and cooked over a fire, their utensils included old tin cans and they supplemented the meal with other foodstuffs purchased or begged from a nearby town. The remainder of Dragostedt's description of his jungle highlights this. Empty boxcars provided "protection against rain and a place to sleep," and the gathering place was located half a mile from a railroad junction and two miles from a small town. Thus, the resources of nature were not the only resources that itinerant laborers depended on. They also depended on the resources of industrial society, from its towns and cities to its railroad network.⁴⁷

The intimate connection between hoboes and railroads perhaps most clearly demonstrates the complexity of hoboes' relationships with industrial capitalism. The railroad was an essential method of travel for hoboes, particularly across the vast distances of the West. As one railroad official noted, "Hundreds of idle men infest empty cars on the Great Northern during the summer months."⁴⁸ In 1908, the Interstate Commerce Commission estimated that 47,000 men had been killed in the previous decade trying to illegally ride the rails, a statistic that provides a sense of the ubiquity of rail travel as well as its dangers.⁴⁹ At times, the railroads provided both employment and transportation, and itinerant laborers expressed ambivalence about the companies. When Hayes Perkins was searching for work in the Pacific Northwest in 1898, he said of the railroads: "They beat us and we beat them, is the rule." This

simple statement balanced the harsh conditions of labor at track construction and upkeep with the itinerants' exploitation of the railroads for free transportation, referred to as "beating." A few months later, Perkins disavowed such illegal travel, stating, "It is too much hard work and danger."⁵⁰

That very hard work and danger offered an element of adventure that appealed to many hoboes, however. London felt a "thrill of pride" that "the overland has stopped twice for me ... a poor hobo on the bum" as conductors tried to prevent him from illegally boarding a train. "I alone have twice stopped the overland with its many passengers and coaches, its government mail, and its two thousand steam horses straining in the engine," he boasted.⁵¹ Hobo narratives often included detailed accounts of the skill, physical prowess, and sheer daring needed to ride the rails, and hoboes took great pride in their successes.

Railroads allowed hoboes to move through space at the pace of modern industrial society, and in turn, itinerant labor played a crucial role in building and maintaining railroads throughout the West. In riding the rails and working on the tracks, hoboes remained enmeshed in industrial society. However, many hoboes prided themselves on never paying for a railroad ticket, an action that was part economic necessity and part protest against the capitalist economy that exploited their labor. Thus, hoboes were not exactly consumers of the railroad in the literal sense. They sought to take advantage of the technologies of industrial society while resisting full incorporation, and they were more likely to employ a language of conquest to describe their success in dodging railroad employees and catching a train than to ascribe a rhetoric of conquest to their encounters with nature while on the road. They survived nature, but they beat the railroad.

Observing Nature on the Road

A thread of appreciation of nature runs through tramp narratives alongside descriptions of harsh conditions, and these accounts challenged a simple division between working-class and middle-class experiences of nature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Narratives by tramps often juxtaposed the appeal of natural beauty with more practical observations. Perkins referred to the beauty of "waterfalls tumb[ing] over the steep cliffs" during a trip along an Oregon river, but in other diary entries, he focused more on the potential utility of the land for farming, grazing, timber, and mining than on aesthetic considerations.⁵² Similarly, "the varied beauty of the West Coast" impressed the Wobbly Ralph Chaplin during a stint as a harvest worker. He felt nostalgia for "the mountains and streams of Washington state and Oregon" and reminisced about "the quiet golden loveliness of California's hills." But Chaplin also missed "the smell of wood smoke and lumber in quaint tidewater towns," showing that his memories linked "wild" nature with settlements enmeshed in the industries of the region rather than separating the two.⁵³ J.K. O'Connor described the transcendent beauty of a sunset at Redondo Beach—"never

had I dreamed of such a marvel of beauty as the combination of water, earth, sun and sky”—but he also noted that his appreciation of the sight might have been enhanced by the promise of employment in the lumber-yard of the Willamette Valley Lumber and Improvement Company the next day. Later in O'Connor's narrative, the view of the Golden Gate “utterly eclipsed” even that Redondo Beach sunset and “was of such a sublime nature that even now I dare not ‘rush in, where angels fear to tread.’” O'Connor's prose employed references to the sublime and religious allusions not unlike those of John Muir, but at least for O'Connor, the tramp's life left little room for contemplation: “But all such visions must fade before stern reality, and onward I felt compelled to trudge.”⁵⁴

Hoboes did not possess an innocent or instinctive appreciation for nature. Casual references indicate hoboes' awareness of American cultural debates in an era that saw what the historian David Shi has called a “veritable nature craze.”⁵⁵ In a 1914 letter to his friend Sam Murray, written from a Salt Lake City jail, the Wobbly bard Joe Hill casually referenced Joe Knowles, a man who achieved celebrity status the previous year with a survivalist stunt (probably faked) of living in the Maine woods for eight weeks with no clothes or tools of any kind. Hill called Knowles “the Nature Freak” and commented that “the simple life ... might be all right for a while ... but I am afraid a fellow would get ‘simple’ of getting too much of the simple life.” In subsequent letters to Murray, however, Hill wrote of feeling “a little homesick when you mention that ‘little cabin in the hills’ stuff.” By June of 1915, after many months in jail, Hill declared, “I would like to get a little of that close to nature stuff myself for a couple of months in order to regain a little vitality.” Such statements show that hoboes like Hill were aware of and engaged with the “back to nature” trends of the day, even when they mocked extreme examples such as Joe Knowles.⁵⁶

Other references demonstrate an explicit critique of the idea that only middle- and upper-class Americans possessed the capacity to truly appreciate nature. In a story by Ralph Winstead, his character Tightline Johnson complained that he did not understand why people wrote about nature “when there it is, right in front of a feller in real life, if only he goes out and looks at it.” Writers should focus on “conditions and organization and things that are important, and let people that are interested in nature-lovin' go out and get their nature first hand.”⁵⁷ In another story, Winstead's tale of Johnson's stint as a logging gypo in the Olympic Mountains juxtaposed nature and labor. Johnson grew to increasingly admire the scenery until, in his own words, “finally it got so that it appealed to me more than even the buckin' did though I admit that was sure fascinatin'.” With no small amount of irony, he added, “It certainly was wonderful to get away up on the mountain side and look down on the riggin' crew a sweatin' and strainin' like little ants down in the valley.”⁵⁸ In these fictional narratives representing the point of view of an IWW organizer and worker, itinerant workers were not only capable of admiring scenic environments but, in fact, experienced nature more directly than did

the middle-class enthusiasts who wrote books about it. The enjoyment of scenic nature was explicitly contrasted with the hard physical labor of work on a logging crew—the story did not mention the physical exertion necessary to climb to a vantage point high on the mountain—but Johnson could clearly “know” nature both through labor and through leisure and contemplation, itself an appealing transgression against the work that he “should” be doing.

Moments of appreciation of nature recur in tramp narratives with sufficient regularity to indicate that even these men whose working lives focused on hard physical labor in industries that commodified nature participated in the prevailing cultural trend of seeking peace and enlightenment in sublime nature. Knowing nature through labor and knowing nature through contemplation did not prove mutually exclusive among itinerant laborers in the American West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although nature could present hardships, it also offered an alternative to the dangers and indignities of work. In this, hoboes seemingly differed from urban and rural Oregon workers, who opposed efforts to set aside scenic nature for recreation on grounds that such preservation served only elites. This changed when the spread of the automobile allowed more workers to become active users of natural areas in the 1920s.⁵⁹ Hoboes expressed a different class critique, perhaps because of their personal experiences of time spent in nature, in asserting that they, too, appreciated nature. Their sojourns in the mountains of the Pacific Northwest and the golden hills of California were not only idle recreation but also an escape from brutal work and living conditions while employed.

Nature on the Job

Although itinerant laborers were industrial workers, this certainly did not imply that their work was divorced from nature. In fact, much of their labor took place in resource extraction industries in which they engaged in hard, dangerous labor in the outdoors. As Montrie notes, “how work was done, why it was done, and to what end mattered a great deal” when it came to people’s relationship with nature through labor.⁶⁰ Hoboes’ writings about work expressed a mixture of pride in its physicality and awareness of its risks. They asserted their expertise one moment and denounced the alienation of short-term wage labor under brutal conditions the next. These contradictions reflected an attempt to make sense of changing economic and material conditions and negotiate the transition to a modern, industrial world.

Descriptions of work highlighted its hard, physical nature and its demands on both body and soul, but men’s ideas about work also revealed pride in their status as workers or producers. Wyckoff observed that among working-class men “only that is ‘work’ which bring your hands into immediate contact with the materials of production in their making from the raw or in their transportation.”⁶¹ This definition emphasized not only direct bodily contact with the materials of production, but also granted resource extraction, processing, and transportation jobs privileged status as “real work.” The form of labor and

the type of industry both mattered. Even Jack London, who sought to escape this world of labor first as a tramp and later as a writer, recognized its power. He wrote of bringing “the large airs of the world, freighted with the lusty smells of sweat and strife” into the lives of two women who offered him breakfast in exchange for his stories. To prove his “claim” to charity, London “scratched their soft palms with the callous of my own palms—the half-inch horn that comes of pull-and-haul of rope and long and arduous hours of caressing shovel-handles.” London’s words emphasized bodily contact and bodily changes, the smell of sweat and the callouses earned “by toil performed,” as markers of work.⁶² In keeping with producerist tradition, status and authority came from rough, physical labor, in contrast to more effete occupations, and that status as a worker marked men’s bodies.⁶³

Contact with nature while on the job did not only occur in the form of calloused hands meeting raw materials of production. Living conditions offered little protection from the elements and often left workers with a feeling of dehumanization. Swift suggested that employers saw dairy workers as no more than “good, faithful, indescribable beasts of burden,” due none of the comforts expected for a human being. The workers slept in the cattle shed “with all its cattle companionship and smells.”⁶⁴ Perkins, too, felt that “a hired man is but a domestic animal in this Western country” and described sleeping in the barn on a ranch where he worked for a few weeks in 1898.⁶⁵ In 1914, Mills described only a thin veneer of humanity in a lumber camp: “Three times a day we come in to feed. Unwashed, most of us, we pour in: animals we come to satisfy an animal desire.” The camp had no toilets; workers used the hillsides. The cold was constant.⁶⁶ Similarly, Edward A. Brown of the California Commission of Immigration and Housing observed that, before 1913, labor camp operators in California saw workers as seeking only “a place in which they could be fed,” with shelter not even perceived to be essential. Brown’s choice of language—the men needed a place to be fed like animals, not a place to eat like civilized people—implied the dehumanization of itinerant workers by employers, and he went on to castigate the camp operators for “ignorance of what was due a human being.”⁶⁷

Itinerant workers used their mobility as a means of negotiating with employers and protesting uncomfortable and dangerous working and living conditions.⁶⁸ Elmer Enderlin, who worked in fifty-eight different mines over sixty years, attributed his longevity in part to his policy of avoiding dangerous or wet conditions. “I would quit whenever it didn’t look good to me,” he remembered. “Several of them I quit the first shift.”⁶⁹ Hobo songs also recognized the hazards of their jobs, as shown in the following verse by Bill Quirke:

*Say, mate, have you seen the mills
Where the kids at the loom spit blood?
Have you been in the mines when the fire damp blew,
Have you shipped as a hand with a freighter’s crew,
Or worked in a levee flood?*⁷⁰

The environmental historian Andrew Isenberg has called logging the most dangerous job in nineteenth-century America, and mining must have been a contender for that dubious title, as well. Colorado coal mines averaged 6.81 fatalities per year per thousand workers from 1884 to 1912.⁷¹ Even seemingly safer industries such as agriculture could pose dangers for workers. A student investigator sent to work on a ranch reported, “I was sent down well-pits, 100 feet in depth, in mud up to my waist, to examine leaks. On windy days I was sent to the tops of old windmills about 50 feet in height.”⁷² The hazards of these jobs came from a combination of environmental conditions, technological developments, and industrial capitalist imperatives.

Even when laborers were not at risk of death or serious injury, their accounts of work emphasized the hard physical labor of the jobs available to itinerant workers. Perkins observed that “none of these jobs are sinecures, and if there was anything soft about them, I would never get one.” Looking at the bright side, he euphemistically noted that “men all keep in good condition on a threshing outfit.”⁷³ O’Connor also wrote of how “every bone and joint ached” after nine and a half hours of work in a Southern California lumberyard. After his first day, “Oregon pine and redwood filled my dreams that night—shingles, slabs, clapboards, scantlings, beams, planks, were there in dire profusion.” With his gloves worn through and his fingers sore, O’Connor began “killing time” more than he worked and was fired before noon on his third day on the job. After deductions for room and board, he received \$2.70 for his labors.⁷⁴ O’Connor’s description of his dream demonstrates the ways in which even mind-numbing, back-breaking work stayed with the men, giving them an understanding of work processes and the natural resources that they handled—or, from another perspective, haunting even their dreams.

As dreams of lumber imply, for all that they were perceived and treated as interchangeable unskilled laborers, itinerant laborers developed expertise as workers. Articles in *Railway Age Gazette* emphasized the knowledge that hoboes accumulated through multiple stints at railroad construction and repair, even going so far as to state that experienced hoboes were “liable to have a better knowledge of track work than the foreman in charge.”⁷⁵ Another article noted, perhaps euphemistically, that the hobo was “familiar with all branches of a railway, from the train service to the detective department,” but also that, “while he works the hobo is unsurpassed as a track man.”⁷⁶ Hoboes might be reluctant workers, but they often possessed real expertise at jobs that were not always as “unskilled” as their classifications suggested.

Expertise could be a mixed blessing, however, and another Tightline Johnson story by Ralph Winstead emphasized that being a valued employee in a dangerous industry offered no protection. As a young man working in a lead smelter in Coeur d’Alenes, Johnson met Andy Anderson, an old Swede who “knew charges.” His knowledge was such that “the smell of the smoke told him more than a chemist would ever find out,” but this knowledge was hard earned. Anderson had been poisoned by extended exposure to lead; his hands were so damaged that one functioned only as a hook while the other

had the use of three fingers. Despite his disabilities, Anderson was such a valuable worker that “the company wanted to keep him,” and he remained on the job until he died there, his body burning in the company furnace. In Winstead’s words, “so at last the company got back even the lead that had been eatin’ into Andy’s bones and playin’ tag thru [sic] Andy’s veins.”⁷⁷ The story thus highlighted not only the dangers of the job but also the reality that a worker ultimately gained nothing by developing his knowledge of work processes and the nature involved. Through his tale, Winstead warned his readers that their employers looked out for profits rather than workers’ health and safety, demonstrating a surprising sophistication about industrial hazards in the process. For Tightline Johnson, the solution was to join the IWW.

Both stories and personal experience ensured that hoboes were cognizant of the precarious conditions of their lives, and if they forgot, both nature and work would soon remind them. Charles H. Forster, a pastor who spent time among northern California hoboes, described a night in their camp in which nature’s harshness, “the pelt of the rain, the roar of the river below us, and the shriek of the storm,” accompanied the men’s reflections on death after a young Italian worker had been killed by a falling rock and swept away by the river. The men expressed “bitterness and pessimism” at the risks they took with little chance of gain.⁷⁸ The experience of work was at best a bittersweet one for itinerant laborers. They might take pride in their expertise, physical strength, and hard work, but they also experienced dehumanizing conditions both while working and in the living quarters available on the job. They did gain knowledge of nature through their work in industries extracting the West’s wealth of resources, but they quickly realized that their places as the “hands” or muscle of industrial society offered very real hazards and little hope of advancement. As a result, some of them took advantage of their mobility to turn to nature as a source of solace and escape. Nature, like organizing, could offer a hope of redemption for itinerant workers buffeted by both economic and environmental forces.⁷⁹

Drawing on broader cultural discourses about the benefits of time spent in nature, at least some hoboes embraced a modern (if flawed) sensibility of nature as a place offering an escape from both work and industrial society as a whole. They constructed their interludes of travel and stolen moments during the workday as encounters with nature in both its harshness and its beauty. Their perception of nature was more complicated than the recreational nature of the middle- and upper-class nature craze—it was a place of brutal cold as well as sublime mountain views—but their descriptions clearly reflected engagement with contemporary discourse that valued time spent in natural settings as conducive to both mental and physical health. In keeping with their class awareness, Winstead and other hobo writers inverted the prevailing view that only middle- and upper-class Americans possessed the capacity to appreciate nature. In their pursuit of leisure in nature, hoboes presaged a shift that took place among the broader working classes beginning in the 1920s as the automobile democratized access to nature recreation. Ironically, itinerant laborers’ marginal status and

their willingness to risk exploiting railroads for free travel allowed them greater mobility than more settled workers, and they joined members of the privileged classes in tramping the landscapes of the West.

The promise of nature for itinerant laborers echoed in another of Tightline Johnson's lines: "Mountains and valleys with clear tumblin' river and misty clouds hangin' half way up can sure wipe out the memory of a lot of squalid misery found in more civilized section." He added that, "Somehow they make a fellow feel that life is big and not exactly centered about himself."⁸⁰ For all the hardships that nature could impose on hoboos, it could also offer hope and a sense of life beyond the work camp or lodging house. As Brazier indignantly noted when he declared that migratory workers "have a concept of beauty too," their experiences of hard labor did not dull workers' appreciation of the beauty of the American West. Nature seemed to offer some hope of redemption, whether temporary or lasting, for itinerant laborers seeking alternatives to lives of unremitting labor.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Joyce L. Kornbluh, ed., *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1964), 66.
2. Cornelia Straton Parker, Introduction to *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays*, by Carleton H. Parker (New York, 1920), 17. Parker, *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays*, 69.
3. David Igler, *Industrial Cowboys: Miller & Lux and the Transformation of the Far West* (Berkeley, CA, 2001), 144.
4. William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, 1991). Gray Brechin's environmental history of San Francisco describes the city as a maelstrom inexorably drawing in resources from its *contado*, but he, too, pays little attention to the lives and experiences of ordinary people. Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin* (Berkeley, CA, 1999). Frank Tobias Higbie notes how itinerant laborers in the Midwest linked urban and rural economies and cultures during this period. Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1880–1930* (Urbana and Chicago, 2003).
5. Nels Anderson, *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man* (Chicago, 1923), 129.
6. For a discussion of back-to-nature movements, see Peter J. Schmitt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America* (New York, 1969).
7. Cletus E. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California's Farmworkers, 1870–1941* (Ithaca, NY, 1981), 46–50. Todd DePastino, Introduction to *The Road*, by Jack London, ed. Todd DePastino (New Brunswick, NJ, 2006), x, xix–xxi. Jack London, *The Road*, ed. Todd DePastino, 134–40. *Hard Times* (San Francisco, January 1894), California State Library collections.
8. Todd DePastino, *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (Chicago, 2003); Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts*; Mark Wyman, *Hoboos: Bindlestiffs, Fruit Tramps, and the Harvesting of the West* (New York, 2010). Other histories of hoboos and the broader phenomenon of itinerant labor include Eric H. Monkkonen, ed., *Walking to Work: Tramps in America, 1790–1935* (Lincoln, NE, 1984); Kenneth L. Kusmer, *Down & Out, on the Road: The Homeless in American History* (New York, 2002).
9. Works on the IWW include Greg Hall, *Harvest Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World and Agricultural Laborers in the American West, 1905–1930* (Corvallis, OR, 2001); Robert L. Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods: The I.W.W. in the Pacific Northwest* (Eugene, OR, 1967); Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (New York, 1969).
10. Roderick Nash, "The Value of Wilderness," *Environmental Review* 1 (1976): 16.

11. Chad Montrie, *Making a Living: Work and Environment in the United States* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2008); Lawrence M. Lipin, *Workers and the Wild: Conservation, Consumerism, and Labor in Oregon, 1910–1930* (Urbana and Chicago, 2007); Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley, CA, 2001); Richard W. Judd, *Common Lands, Common People: The Origins of Conservation in Northern New England* (Cambridge, MA, 1997).

12. Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York, 1995), x. White, “‘Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?: Work and Nature,” *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York, 1995), 171–85.

13. Gunther Peck, “The Nature of Labor: Fault Lines and Common Ground in Environmental and Labor History,” *Environmental History* 11 (2006): 219.

14. Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America’s Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge, MA, 2008), 125.

15. Kathryn Morse, *The Nature of Gold: An Environmental History of the Klondike Gold Rush* (Seattle, WA, 2003), 192. Other works considering these questions in the West in roughly this period include Connie Chiang, *Shaping the Shoreline: Fisheries and Tourism on the Monterey Coast* (Seattle, WA, 2008); Matthew Klinge, *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (New Haven, CT, 2007); Andrew C. Isenberg, *Mining California: An Ecological History* (New York, 2005); Lissa Wadewitz, “Pirates of the Salish Sea: Labor, Mobility, and Environment in the Transnational West,” *Pacific Historical Review* 75 (2006): 587–627.

16. Lipin, *Workers and the Wild*, and sections of Montrie, *Making a Living*, focus on union workers. Both also discuss the spread of nature recreation among working-class Americans after the 1920s. See also Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle, WA, 2002).

17. Quoted in Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*, 71.

18. Ann Fabian, *The Unvarnished Truth: Personal Narratives in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley, CA, 2000), xii, also 4–11. For a discussion of London’s tramp stories in particular, see DePastino, “Introduction,” *The Road*. DePastino discusses the resonance of frontier narratives among hoboes in *Citizen Hobo*, 117–20.

19. For in-depth discussions of the reports of investigators and hobo life stories as sources, see Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts* and DePastino, *Citizen Hobo*.

20. Both contemporary observers and historians have perceived hoboes as distinct both culturally and socially from these “non-white” workers as well as from local “white” workers who did not engage in the same patterns of labor mobility. For the diversity of agricultural workforces in the West during this period, see Wyman, *Hoboes*, who suggests that these distinctions were somewhat artificial for harvest laborers. For a discussion of female transients, see Lynn Weiner, “Sisters of the Road: Women Transients and Tramps,” in *Walking to Work*, 171–88.

21. *A Report of the Commission of Immigration and Housing of California to the Honorable Hiram W. Johnson, Governor of California* (July 10, 1914), Carton 1, folder Commission of Immigration and Housing—programs, reports, minutes, Simon J. Lubin papers, Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, BANC MSS C-B 1059. In Chicago, Solenberger found that 625 out of 1000 “homeless” men were native-born. The percentage was even higher, 76 percent, among those whom she classified as tramps. Alice Willard Solenberger, *One Thousand Homeless Men; A Study of Original Records* (New York, 1911), 20, 69, 217. In 1924, a study of homeless men in San Francisco found that 80 percent were American-born. W.S. Goodrich, *A Study of the Homeless Man Problem in San Francisco* (San Francisco, 1924), 30. Higbie’s examination of the demographics of Midwest hoboes found them nearly identical to the laboring population as a whole. Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts*, 100–105.

22. Nels Anderson, *On Hobos and Homelessness* (Chicago, 1998), 26–27. Stewart Bird, Dan Georgakas, and Deborah Shaffer, eds., *Solidarity Forever: An Oral History of the IWW* (Chicago, 1985), 104–105. DePastino, *Citizen Hobo*, 99–101. Bill Donahue, “Naked Joe,” *Boston Magazine* (April 2013): 2. Chaplin’s autobiography includes repeated references to London. Ralph Chaplin, *Wobbly: The Rough-and-Tumble Story of an American Radical* (Chicago, 1948), 67–68, 84, 92, 100, 105, 198. Nature writing and wilderness novels of this era are discussed in Schmitt, *Back to Nature*.

23. Anderson, *The Hobo*, 87.

24. Edmond Kelly, *The Elimination of the Tramp by the Introduction into America of the Labour Colony System Already Proved Effective in Holland, Belgium, and Switzerland, with the Modifications Thereof Necessary to Adapt this System to American Conditions* (New York, 1908), xviii.
25. Paul Groth, *Living Downtown: The History of Residential Hotels in the United States* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1994), 135.
26. For discussions of the tramping of “skilled” workers, see DePastino, *Citizen Hobo*, 11–12; Jules Tygiel, “Tramping Artisans: Carpenters in Industrial America, 1880–90,” in *Walking to Work*, 87–117. Monknonen has called tramps “the ordinary working people of the United States on the move between jobs and residences.” Monknonen, Introduction to *Walking to Work*, 5.
27. DePastino, Introduction to *The Road*, xxii.
28. Meredith Eliassen and Frank B. Rudolph, “Adventures in Nature: The Merry Tramps of Oakland,” *California History* 82 (2004): 6–17. Thomas Dykes Beasley, *A Tramp Through the Bret Harte Country* (San Francisco, CA, 1914), 44, 93. Muir quoted in David E. Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (New York, 1985), 196.
29. “Tramp, n.1,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, September 2013, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/204517?rskey=rMyZkL&result=1> (accessed November 14, 2013).
30. Gregory R. Woirol, “Men on the Road: Early Twentieth-Century Surveys of Itinerant Labor in California,” *California History* 70 (1991): 198.
31. Solenberger, *One Thousand Homeless Men*, 219–20. Andress Floyd, *My Monks of Vagabondia* (n.p., 1913), 135. A-No. 1 (Leon Ray Livingston) strongly emphasizes the role of “Wanderlust” in his books.
32. A-No. 1, *Life and Adventures of A-No. 1, America’s Most Celebrated Tramp, Written by Himself* (Cambridge Springs, PA, 1910), 72. Beasley, *A Tramp Through the Bret Harte Country*, 94–95.
33. R.L. Adams and T.R. Kelly, *A Study of Farm Labor in California* (Berkeley, CA, 1918), 71.
34. Beasley, *A Tramp through the Bret Hart Country*, 94.
35. London, *The Road*, 120. Elsewhere London described “the absence of monotony” as “perhaps the greatest charm of tramp-life,” adding that “the hobo never knows what is going to happen the next moment; hence, he lives only in the present moment” (54). See also Peter Alexander Speek, “The Psychology of Floating Workers,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 69 (1917): 78.
36. Walter A. Wyckoff, *A Day With a Tramp and Other Days* (New York, 1901), 105.
37. Parker, *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays*, 70–71, 78–79. Charles Ely Adams, “The Real Hobo: What He Is and How He Lives,” *Forum* 33 (1902): 443.
38. Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*, 136.
39. Wyman, *Hoboes*, 72–77. Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880–1940* (New York, 1987).
40. Montrie, *Making a Living*, 35–52, 71–76.
41. A-No. 1, *Life and Adventures of A-No. 1*, 2.
42. London, *The Road*, 104.
43. Andrew Saunders, “The Story of the Three Travelers,” *Socialist Voice*, October 27, 1906.
44. Morrison I. Swift, *What a Tramp Learns in California. Social Danger Line* (San Francisco, 1896), 2.
45. Quoted in Anderson, *On Hobos and Homelessness*, 45–46.
46. Quoted in Bird, Georgakas, and Shaffer, *Solidarity Forever*, 104.
47. Anderson, *On Hobos and Homelessness*, 45–46. Morse emphasizes this point in analyzing the resource networks of Klondike miners in *The Nature of Gold*.
48. Quoted in Orlando F. Lewis, *Vagrancy in the United States* (New York, 1907), 24.
49. Gregory R. Woirol, *In the Floating Army: F.C. Mills on Itinerant Life in California, 1914* (Urbana and Chicago, 1992), 97. Railroad companies counted 156,390 “trespassers” killed or injured between 1888 and 1905. If anything, official statistics probably underestimated the number of casualties. Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts*, 52.
50. Hayes Perkins, “Here and There: An Itinerant Worker in the Pacific Northwest, 1898,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 102 (2001): 363, 365.

51. London, *The Road*, 40.
52. Perkins, "Here and There," 370–71 and 361.
53. Chaplin, *Wobbly*, 90.
54. J.K. O'Connor, *The Travels of a Tramp* (New York, 1903), 156, 186.
55. Shi, *The Simple Life*, 194.
56. Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Letters of Joe Hill* (New York, 1965), 13, 32, 34. For an account of Knowles, see Donahue, "Naked Joe," 1–3.
57. Ralph Winstead, "Chin-Whiskers, Hay-Wire, and Pitchforks," in Kornbluh, ed., *Rebel Voices*, 276.
58. Ralph Winstead, "Johnson The Gypo," in Kornbluh, ed., *Rebel Voices*, 285.
59. Lipin, *Workers and the Wild*, 87–88.
60. Montrie, *Making a Living*, 3.
61. Walter A. Wyckoff, *The Workers: An Experiment in Reality, The West* (New York, 1898), 161–62.
62. London, *The Road*, 56.
63. There was an obvious gender politics to such judgments that unfortunately lies outside the scope of this article. For discussion of the gender politics of hobo life, see DePastino, *Citizen Hobo*, 83–91; Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts*.
64. Swift, *What a Tramp Learns in California*, 22.
65. Perkins, "Here and There," 358.
66. Woiron, *In the Floating Army*, ix–x, 1, 10–14, 55–56.
67. Edward A. Brown, "Labor Camp Sanitation and Housing in California: A History of Progress from 1913 to 1922," November 1922, California Dept. of Industrial Relations, Division of Immigration and Housing Records, BANC MSS C-A 194, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley: 14.
68. Thomas Andrews notes this phenomenon among workers passing through the Colorado coal fields. Andrews, *Killing for Coal*, 121. Reformers and employers worried about how to keep men on the job. For example, see Solenberger, *One Thousand Homeless Men*, 150–54.
69. Elmer Enderlin, Oral History, "Miner in Fifty-Eight Mines," The Knoxville/McLaughlin Gold Mine, Northern California, 1978–1995, vol. III (1998), BANC MSS 98/181c, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley: 83, 91.
70. Reprinted in Kornbluh, ed., *Rebel Voices*, 68.
71. Isenberg, *Mining California*, 86. Andrews, *Killing for Coal*, 147.
72. Adams and Kelly, *A Study of Farm Labor in California*, 28.
73. Perkins, "Here and There," 366–67.
74. O'Connor, *The Travels of a Tramp*, 157–59.
75. E. Keough, "Characteristics of the Hobo," *Railway Age Gazette* 52 (1912): 1566.
76. E. R. Lewis, "The Ability of the Hobo," *Railway Age Gazette* 52 (1912): 1567. Even these articles in praise of hobo labor noted that the men avoided the most "disagreeable" jobs such as stone ballast work, work in swamps, and jobs handling coal. Keough, "Characteristics of the Hobo," 1566.
77. Ralph Winstead, "Tightline Johnson Goes to Heaven," in Kornbluh, ed., *Rebel Voices*, 91–92.
78. Charles H. Forster, "Despised and Rejected of Men: Hoboes of the Pacific Coast," *Survey* 32 (1914): 671.
79. Peck suggests that "visions of redeemed nature and labor ... have repeatedly shaped each other's evolution and articulation, transforming the material relationships between 'nature' and 'labor' in the process." Peck, "The Nature of Labor," 230.
80. Winstead, "Johnson the Gypo," 283.