

AUGUST 15, 1985

Until my plane leaves, I am holding a small square of floor and chair space in London's Gatwick air terminal. British police and airport security guards are inspecting the long lines of travelers passing in front of my position. Hundreds of Americans are going through the check points. Mommas are dragging knee-locked kids, and fathers who left home exhausted from overwork could be hired on the spot if the job didn't offer any vacation benefits.

From the way people keep piling in here out of cabs and off the trains, it looks impossible to check all the parcels and look in everybody's hip pocket for a pistol or a bomb. Husband and wife teams are so overloaded by export cargo that a goalie in the Canadian Hockey League would be easier to search than they are.

Mountain outfitters, I think should have a chance to study tourists on their final lap home. Prospectors expert at diamond-hitching their gear on a pack mule would be amazed at the different ways packages and sacks can be clutched and draped and hung on the human frame.

Also, unlike pack mules, a young husband will carry three times his weight before he'll buck off a single article. I sidestepped a young couple at a cab stand a short time ago that looked like they were changing their homestead. She had enough sweaters stuffed in her pockets to hold up a customs line for two whole hours. I feel certain they'll both win seats on next year's foreign trade conferences between the United Kingdom and the U.S.A.

The hardest part of the wait is that this is the third day I've passed without any butter. Up in the Lake District, I was using 18 ounces of butter a day. A guy that exports chocolates to the U.S. showed me how to rub clotted cream on the roof of my mouth to reduce the withdraws, but I've still had a rough time kicking the habit.

I don't think I've had a chance to tell you that I dropped 6.25 ounces on my walking trip. The clothes I'd left in London fit all right when I got back, so I am afraid that the loss was an internal one, which is the worst kind for people my age.

Hearing all the time how much the British pound is falling against the dollar doesn't bother a herder as much as it does city folks. After a lifetime of watching cattle drop against the dollar makes these limits sound like a mere swish of the pen.

I wish there was a way to get the English version of my trip. I sure like these hombres even though they do chop up the language and never spend enough time letting a word out of their mouths.