



## **Mike Zywina – Who will pick you up, and why?**

**Approximately 8,132 people gave Hitchers lifts in Easter 2009 – but why? Mike Zywina, who hitched in 2005 and now works for LCD as Events Officer, explores who out there is making the event tick, and why they are happy to help.**

In my job there's one question that people ask me more than anything else: "Is hitch-hiking safe?"

I usually point out that LCD Hitchers receive a lot more support and protection than independent hitch-hikers – you can read more about that here. But the less obvious response is to say "Safe for whom: the Hitcher or the driver?"

They say there is no such thing as bad publicity, but when it comes to hitch-hiking it only takes one scare story amid thousands of success stories to fuel negative perception of the activity. And, sadly, it is usually the drivers that pick up hitch-hikers who unfairly bear the brunt of this stigma.

In my opinion, not enough thought is given to the positive qualities of those who offer hitch-hikers a lift. The people who pick up a group of strangers and invite them into the private space of their vehicle are taking a step into the unknown too.

And yet 428 Hitch groups made their way to Prague and Morocco last year, taking an average of 19 lifts to get there. That's a whopping 8,132 lifts! So who picked them up, and why did they do it?

A decent percentage of these kind souls are long-distance commercial drivers. They cover hundreds of miles a day in cars and lorries, often without seeing family or friends for a week at a time. For them, the chance to pick up a group of Hitchers is a rare opportunity for company and conversation, as well as the chance to support a worthy cause.

It's little wonder then that many Hitchers get on so well with their drivers. Each year many people get taken for meals, invited to meet a driver's family and given a place to spend the night for free. I experienced much of this kindness myself when on the road – people were full of praise for what I was doing, and even those who couldn't pick me up asked to sponsor me or offered words of support.

As well as commercial drivers, a great many everyday people and families pick up a group. And Hitchers have also been picked up by professional sportsmen and former Big Brother contestants. Even the Spanish national rugby team bus gave a lift to one group!

Every year LCD is inundated by emails from drivers who have nothing but praise for the Hitchers they helped along the way. It's hard not to be impressed by the initiative and sense of adventure shown by a group willing to thumb their way across Europe and raise hundreds of pounds for a good cause!

So if you're hitching this year, rest assured that there is no lack of people willing to support your efforts. And if you're on the roads yourself and happen to see those upturned thumbs and eager eyes, remember that a little bit of kindness can go a long way...all the way to Morocco and Prague in fact!

**Do you have a memorable Hitch story that you'd like to share with LCD? Email us today and you could feature in our next blog.**