OVERLAND, KATHMANDU TO LONDON,

APRIL TO AUGUST 1977

INTRODUCTION

The London–Sydney Marathon was a car rally from the United Kingdom to

Australia held in 1968. It was decided to route the rally from London to Dover,

then by ferry to Calais and then on to Paris, Turin, Beograd, through Bulgaria to

Istanbul and then to Teheran in Iran, Kabul in Afghanistan, to Pakistan and on

to Bombay via Delhi.

The first 72 cars to arrive in Bombay were to be taken by sea to Fremantle in

Western Australia on-board the P&O liner *S.S. Chusan*, where they would be

disembarked and then drive the final 2,600 miles to Sydney. The event received

great publicity, and over 800 applications were received, with 100 being

accepted.

I followed the rally closely and it was more than likely that this car rally was

the inspiration for me to travel this route.

There was a photo of Evan Green’s Austin 1800 taken in Afghanistan that was

printed in the newspapers at the time. It was an iconic photo and it captured my

imagination, I remember clearly, as chance happened, we had stopped the bus at what seemed to be the exact place that that photo had been taken. I didn’t say anything to the other travellers at the time as I thought it would be irrelevant to them, but it was a scene for me that encapsulated my dream.

I was already aware of Pennworld Overland covering this route, and when I saw the Capricorn brochure offering a trip through Iraq, Jordan and Egypt, I was sold. I left the place where I worked on the 15th April 1977, a week before I was due to leave on the Overland. I spent the week getting ready and buying last minute items to take on the trip. I also had a few lunches lined up, and some farewell parties.

I had to borrow some money off a couple of friends, Ray and Dave to be able to pay Grace Bros. Travel for my tickets.

I took my severance pay to the Bank of N.S.W. in William Street Kings Cross, where the Company had their account so as to enable me to cash the cheque faster to repay my loans. No such thing as credit cards in those days!

Travel for the overland with Capricorn cost $675.00.

A Thai Airways International ticket from Sydney – Singapore – Bangkok – Kathmandu, issued 29th March 1977 cost $662.00.

A cost of $1,337.00.

Visas, accommodation and meals were at our own expense.

FLYING TO KATHMANDU

After a wonderful send off and farewell by my friends at Sydney’s Kingsford Smith Airport, I departed Sydney on the 25th April 1977 at 11.20am flying on board Thai International DC10 flight TG 982 to begin a most amazing journey, a journey that would fulfil dreams and inspire more.

The sights flying into Singapore were so memorable; looking out the window of the aircraft at the sight of hundreds of freight ships lying off the island was unbelievable to me. We arrived at Payer Lebar, Singapore International Airport at 6.00pm local time.

Stepping out into the hot steamy air of Singapore, there was a bus waiting for the group at the airport. I knew no one, and as I sat in the bus and waited for the others to board, a person sat down next to me and said hello. This was Mark, someone who I would continue our journey with long after we arrived in London. We travelled on to the Faroe Islands and to Iceland by ferry; along with others, he continued to become a life long friend.

After checking in at the Miramar Hotel, we went on a night tour of the sights of

Singapore, taking in China Town, the hideaway corners of old Singapore and the famous Raffles Hotel. This being my first experience of an overseas country, I was in awe of the different lifestyle with the teeming markets with tiny alleyways with shops bulging with goods. The evening ended with outdoor drinks at Bugis Street with the famous “ladyboys” strutting their stuff. I remember being shocked at the sight of rats running free along the walls and around the streets. We were back at the hotel by 1.30 am.

Considering the time difference, a very long day, I think 4.30am Sydney time. This was my first experience meeting my fellow travellers.

The next day we boarded a bus for a city tour visiting the Tiger Balm gardens, and a very impressive private jade collection. Dinner at a side street cafe was a first time experience of this style of dinner; I still remember the new smells of Asian cuisine, the aroma of coriander still reminds me of this.

Wednesday the 27th I was sitting in the cafe of the hotel writing post cards, looking around me, I saw my new travelling colleagues doing much the same. We ended up going to Sentosa Island by ferry for a swim and a visit to the Surrender Chambers at Fort Siloso, Sentosa. This gallery displays life-like wax figurine displays of the surrender ceremonies of the Japanese after WWII. We took the cable car back to the Singapore mainland.

That evening I went to the “Carpark” restaurant for dinner with Sheila, a pommie girl, she was nice and friendly. The Carpark was a famous open air jumble of hawkers with trolleys and portable stalls selling an amazing variety of exotic food. I was lucky to be able to go there as it was closed soon after, replaced by a government organised, sanitised eating-place, with nothing of the atmosphere of before.

It was a 5am start to fly to Bangkok and arrived after a very rough 3½ hour flight via K.L. We stayed at the Ra-Jah Hotel. I found that Bangkok had the same eastern flavour of Singapore and I was still in awe of the temples and different life style. We visited the Golden Hill Temple with views over the city and I couldn’t believe the size of the city. I had never seen the size of anything like this. It was immense!

The next day we rose early at 6am to visit the floating markets. The canals were busy with boats powered along by large car engines mounted on the prop shafts and travelling very fast. It seemed to me to be chaotic and crowded, the water was filthy, and I couldn’t believe that people on the banks were washing their clothes in the water.

We had a free afternoon, so I walked around Bangkok exploring. The heat was extreme. I returned to the hotel for a shower more than once!

That evening, Mark and I went to have a look at one of the “girlie’ clubs. The girls sat in a glassed off room, sitting in rows each girl displaying a number, so that you could make your choice of girl by that number. Mark and I left; somehow we felt threatened and made it back to our hotel before the curfew at 1am.

We had one more day to explore Bangkok, and then we were off to Kathmandu the next morning.

NEPAL

Sunday the 1st May saw another 5am start for the flight to Kathmandu, from where the Overland journey was to begin.

Previous travellers had said, and word had it that we would travel from Kathmandu to India by local buses, but while waiting at the airport to be picked up by a local bus, along came the Capricorn Bus with Bill driving. The coach was a Plaxtons “Panorama” the same type of coach that was used in the movie “The Italian Job” with Michael Caine.

Kathmandu seemed, in contrast to the rush and bustle of Singapore and Bangkok, to be a quiet place nestled in a beautiful valley among the Himalayas. Our hotel was the Blue Star, the starting point of many an overland. I had dinner at the hotel and a few beers, and then played cards with my new travelling companions.

After a bit of a sleep in until 9.30, Mark and I and a few others caught a taxi to Bhadgaon (Bhaktapur), nine miles east of Kathmandu city. Built like most

buildings of Kathmandu of mud brick, it was founded by King Ananda Deva in 889A.D. Pottery and weaving are its traditional industries and we explored the many alleyways and very interesting shops.

Back in Kathmandu, Gaye & Jane and I hired bicycles and rode to Swayambhunath, known as the “Monkey Temple”, 2km out of Kathmandu; it is a Buddhist stupa more than 2500 years old. A little kid wanted money to look after our bikes while we went up to the temple; we reluctantly paid him, not expecting our bikes to be there when we returned. We climbed the 500 steps to the temple, 250 feet above the level of the valley. There were monkeys everywhere, and they seemed very aggressive, but we managed to keep clear from them. The experience at the temple was like nothing I had experienced before, there were some Buddhist ceremonies happening, and it was all very exotic and exciting.

The next day we explored the streets of Kathmandu. Kathmandu is the biggest city of the Kingdom, and was extended to its present shape in 723 A.D. The

word Kathmandu is derived from “Kasthmandap” a pagoda structure near Darbar

Square, which is believed to have been built from the timber of a single tree. Darbar Square is in the centre of Kathmandu and it is a showcase of local architecture with its old temples and palaces, and epitomizes the religious and cultural life of the people. A main focus of attraction is the temple of the Kumari; it is the residence of the Living Goddess, a young girl worshipped as a Goddess until she is twelve years old. She acknowledges the greetings of her devotees from the balcony of her temple residence.

In the afternoon, Gaye, Jane and I hired bicycles again to ride to Boudhnath stupa, also, 2500 years old and one of the biggest stupas in the world. It stands with four pairs of eyes of Buddha in four cardinal directions keeping eternal watch over the people.

Later that evening there was our pre-departure meeting. This was the first time I met the others that were to travel on the trip. One such traveller was an American woman who wore a blue dress that was to become very familiar to us as time went on. That blue dress was the only article of clothing she wore for the entire trip with the exception of a well-seasoned poncho she added in cooler weather.

This was also the first time that I met Rex Carson, our driver who turned out to be a long-term friend, along with Bill, another driver and Adrian, a courier, who was not supposed to be accompanying us on his return journey back to London.

Bill and Adrian had bought the bus from London on its outward journey. Rex was sent in to replace Adrian, but Adrian refused to fly home, instead wanting to continue back to London with us particularly as he wanted to visit Iraq, Jordan and Egypt, places that were not on the itinerary on the way out.

There was, at this early stage, a possibility that we might not be able to enter Pakistan because of political problems there. It was suggested that we fly across, while Bill and Rex drove through Pakistan alone. The logistics of this were never discussed, but none the less, it was put as a possibility and an extra cost that we may have to face.

More local sightseeing the following day with a surprise that I found that I had $600.00 missing from my American Express travellers’ cheque wallet. I reported this to the local police and to Interpol. I realised that the tour guide in Bangkok must have taken it during the night that he stayed in my room.

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THE BUS TRIP OF A LIFETIME BEGINS!

On Friday 6th May a group of travellers from Australia, Canada, England, and the U.S. finally gathered together in Kathmandu. Ahead for the group of forty four people, was the longest bus trip in the world, almost four months from Kathmandu to London with basic accommodation of two man tents, cheap hotels, unlimited curiosity and a sense of adventure.

Beginning a ninety four day, 12,500 mile experience of a lifetime we would embark on a journey that would take us through sixteen countries, from the world’s highest peaks of the Himalayas to the lowest point on Earth, the Dead Sea, and on to our destination, London.

We would not only follow the footsteps of Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and Marco Polo, but visit the Holy sites where Jesus Christ, the Prophet Mohamed and The Buddha preached, and the places where the patriarchs, Abraham and Moses once walked.

On the road at last, we left Kathmandu at 8.30am and travelled north to Pokhara passing terraced farming plots, and peaceful peasant villages high in the Himalayan hills, growing crops such as millet and corn and rice. These terraced farms are characteristic of Nepalese farming as it is the only way that farmers can make use of the hilly countryside. This mountain highway is full of snow caped Himalayan peaks.

We arrived at Pokhara at 5.30pm, booking into the new Hotel Crystal.

I woke the next morning to find looking out my window a stunning view of the Annapurna mountain range, with high peaks covered in snow, so high I thought at first I must be mistaken, but quickly, the top of the mountains were covered by cloud. It was a fleeting sight I will never forget.

Departure was delayed by a mechanical problem with the bus, the first of many. It seems a wheel was loose. We were on the road by 10.30 am travelling through more hills and terraced farmland with the scenery now slowly changing to bush and mountain then suddenly changing to flat dusty plains when we arrived at Bhairahawa near the Indian border. That night we all stayed at the Lumbini Hotel, in just a couple of rooms, with twenty people in one room. It was party time in room 108.

INDIA

We left for the border at 7.30 am. The Indian customs were antiquated, even by 1977 standards, there was an old customs official wearing horn rimmed glasses with coke bottle lenses, sitting at an old wooden desk, hand writing everyone’s details into a very large book, it was so slow and time consuming. I wonder how anyone could possibly refer to all the people’s names and passport details at a later date.

I sat by the bus and read a book to pass the time. After 4½ hours at Indian customs, we cleared the border and drove all day to arrive 9.45 pm at Benares (Varanasi) and the Hotel de Paris, a grand old hotel of the colonial period with large rooms and ceiling fans.

We were up at 5.30 am to visit the burning Ghats along the Ganges River. The Ghats are the steps which lead down to the river, from which pilgrims make their sin-cleansing dip in the Ganges and on which at the burning Ghats, bodies are cremated. These are best seen at dawn for the spectacular sights unequalled anywhere else in the world. We hired a row boat to take us out and along the river, where at first light Hindu pilgrims arrive to pray and offer tributes to the river Goddess. It was such an unbelievable sight of cremation, ceremonies and people washing their (and possibly our?) clothes on the same banks of the river where the ashes of the cremated are scattered.

The afternoon was spent with a visit to Sarnath, 10km out of Varanasi; Sarnath is one of major Buddhist centres where The Buddha came to preach his first sermon 2500 years ago and has been a Buddhist shrine ever since.

This was our first glimpse of a large Indian city, and what a mind blower! The poverty and suffering was moving; here, we were constantly besieged by beggars looking for baksheesh, lepers in rags begging for food, all living on the filthy streets. As for the beggars, we felt on occasions to give, but if we did, word would spread and you could be followed for hours by a multitude of beggars, persistent peddlers, and urchins all hoping to get a piece of your generosity, and they refuse to take no for an answer. It was best to ignore them, or when provoked yell at them to go away, “jow”! This might sound a little cruel, but visit India and you will understand.

Returning to the Hotel, we hired rickshaws, touring around town, our rickshaw driver was; Ram Autaar, Rickshaw № 110, C/- Rickshaw stand opposite the Clarke Hotel, Varanasi. India.

I promised that I would send him a postcard later on during my trip, I always felt sorry that I never did. He gave me a try at “driving”, with the chaotic traffic, it is a wonder I survived. I had fun, blowing the horn constantly as the locals do.

Bill drove us back to the Ghats that evening in the bus. It was a tight squeeze getting the bus into some of the tiny back streets, Bill lost his cool a couple of times, threading his way through the throngs of slow people, bicycles, carts and sacred cows getting in the way.

Tuesday 10th May I was sick. I slept until 11am and stayed at the hotel and read until 2.30 when I went for a swim in the pool at the hotel.

There was a cricket match between the hotel staff and the overlanders in the gardens of the hotel; I didn’t understand cricket in those days, but sat and watched then had an early night as it would be a 6am start in the morning.

Wednesday 11th May, we left Varanasi early and drove to Khajuraho.

**The temples of Khajuraho** are one of India’s major attractions; this is a group of

twenty two temples, all with life like sculptures, some erotic, and some mystical – Gods and Goddesses, warriors and musicians, but two elements appear over and over again and in greater detail than anything else, women and sex, like Playboy models posing almost 1000 years ago in stone. These sandstone temples were built by the Chandela Kings during the 10th and 11th centuries AD.

We explored the magnificent cluster of carved temples, beautifully set in well-kept gardens.

That night we stayed in a government hostel with fifteen people to a room.

Thursday 12th May we arrived in Agra at 5.00 pm, a long drive with the countryside dotted with temples and forts. We stayed at the Grand Hotel which was not grand at all, a bit of a dump as I recall.

**Agra** is an ancient city that contains three of the most famous monuments of the

subcontinent.

First of all is the Taj Mahal, built by Shah Jahan for his queen, Mumtaz Mahal, and contains the cenotaph of Jahan himself. It was Shah Jahan’s intention to build an identical tomb for himself in black marble on the opposite bank across the river. The first sight of the Taj was breathtaking; one of the few sights on the overland to take my breath away, this was certainly one of the many highlights of the overland experience.

Secondly is the Red Fort from where Shah Jahan gazed at the Taj Mahal from a chamber window for seven years until his final days.

Fatehpur Sikri is the third. This city was built by Akbar the Great, Shah Jahan’s

grandfather. It was planned by Akbar as his new capital, the walls, 10 kilometres in circumference, are 15 meters high in places and one side is protected by an artificial lake. Akbar moved his court to Fatehpur Sikri, but after his death it was deserted after only 17 years of occupation because of the lack of water. Akbar built a white marble mosque in 1851; the carved marble walls are one of the finest examples of stone craftsmanship in India.

The day was so hot, 103˚ F and we relaxed afterwards in a restaurant and took in a folk music show and we ended up having a late night.

We left Agra at 7am for the short drive to New Delhi arriving 12.30. We stayed in the Y.M.C.A .Tourist Hostel, good food and clean.

Sunday 15th May

We visited the Qutab Minar Complex, situated 15 km south of New Delhi. The Qutab Minar itself is a soaring tower of victory which was commenced in 1193, immediately after the defeat of the last Hindu kingdom in Delhi. It reaches 73 metres high and tapers from a 15 metre diameter base to just 2.5 metres at the top.

At the foot of the minar stands the first mosque to be built in India, the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque.

Inside the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque is a seven metre high iron pillar and has been standing long before the construction of the Mosque and was erected there in the 5th century AD and is made of iron of exceptional purity. Scientists have never discovered after 2000 years, how iron of such purity has not rusted and could be cast using the technology of the time. It must have been so hot, I recall that Dave and I bought a couple of bottles of Golden Eagle lager and sat in a gutter outside the shop and drank them with the locals looking very puzzled at us.

Later that evening we went for a meal of Tandoori Chicken at the famous Moti Mahal restaurant. It is said that it was the first Indian restaurant to introduce

Tandoori cuisine to the world.

By Monday, my replacement American Express travellers’ cheques were ready to pick up.

Diary comment 16th May; “Shit it is hot!”

Tuesday 17th May, we left the Delhi Y.M.C.A. at 6.30 am to travel along

the Grand Trunk Road.

In his novel, Kim, Rudyard Kipling describes the Grand Trunk Road, stretching from Calcutta to Kabul, as "a wonderful spectacle" that "runs straight, bearing without crowding India's traffic for fifteen hundred miles – such a river of life as nowhere else exists in the world".

We travelled through the Punjab, flat land with rich fertile soil, where we turned north towards Jammu & Kashmir. We noticed that there was a lot of military activity in the area. The Moslem Kashmiri’s, given a choice, would prefer to be either independent or part of Pakistan. The Indian soldiers in evidence were there to protect against a local uprising or Pakistani invasion across the disputed border area.

We arrived at a comfortable Jammu hotel at about 7.30 pm. ready for a 5.00 am start in the morning for our journey up into the Himalayas. The climb proved too much for the radiator in the bus, and at 1.30 the bus eventually overheated. As we waited for Bill and Rex to repair it, Mark & Lana played chess on the barrier wall on the side of the road. Fixed and on our way, about 5kms further on through a twisting section of road, near Patnitop, and at 2024m above sea level, we had a major set-back with the differential stripping. This seemed terminal; we were stranded in a beautiful part of the Himalayas. Rex returned to Jammu to arrange for alternate transport and then back to Delhi to arrange for Capricorn to have a new differential sent out. We set up camp in the evening amongst the trees on a hill by the side of the road.

The next morning we woke to the beautiful surroundings of the Himalayas and at about 7am a Tata bus arrived and we all piled in. Even in the cramped conditions of the Indian bus, the views were spectacular, the snow on the mountains in the distance looked like clouds so high. After a spectacular drive over the Batote Pass and through a tunnel on the Banihal Pass we descend into the beautiful Vale of Kashmir and to Srinagar the capital of J&K where we were to stay on houseboats on Dal Lake.

KASHMIR

Kashmir is world famous for its handicrafts; carpets, silver, walnut wood, papier mache, silks and embroidered work. Srinagar is situated on Dal Lake and the Jhelum River. Dal Lake is actually three lakes separated by a maze of intricate waterways and floating gardens, and a series of causeways. We were met at a

jetty by our house keepers in Shikaras. These are long paddle boats and the houseboat keeper took us over to our houseboat called “The Mountain Queen”. Each house boat is looked after by a family. Habib and his family were there to cook our meals and look after us. Each house boat has a small veranda at the

front, behind this is the living room furnished in British 30’s style, and then there are the bedrooms with toilet and shower facilities. Upstairs there is the rooftop sun deck where we read books and wrote postcards. I stayed on this house boat with Pete Yorke and others; in the house boat next to us were Gaye and Jane along with five others.

The reflections in the lake of the snow-capped Himalayan peaks were beautiful. Lake Dal was busy with hawkers selling all things from fruit and vegetables, tinned food, and “Coke, Fanta, Limca” and sometimes, Hashish.

We soon learnt that the water we used for our showers was pumped directly from under the house boat and this was just next to the open toilet, I wondered what those lumpy bits in the water was! Of course, this was where all our water was drawn from and it wouldn’t be long before I was sick.

The next day we were taken for a tour, but this turned out to be a sales trip to a carpet factory and we returned to the houseboat for lunch.

We went on a Shikara ride around the lake to see wood carving & papier mache shops, it was another sales drive. After dinner, we played cards ‘till about 3.30am and probably drank too much.

I woke with a hangover at about 10.30 am, took the Shikara, picked up Mark, and

paddled around the lake stirring up the locals. In the evening, a lot of the others went to the pictures, and I stayed with Gaye and Jane and chatted.

Gulmarg is 52 Km’s from Srinagar and 2,730m above sea level and is India’s premier skiing resort. Gulmarg is spectacular with clear blue skies and brilliant sunshine and some of the finest ski slopes in the world. The road runs only as far as Tangmarg 7 Km distance from Gulmarg and 500 meters below it, with the last stretch having to be made by pony.

I had a bad case of diarrhoea and was worried about getting on ponies and riding up into the mountains, I dosed myself up with Lomotil. I am glad I did, because the scenery was beautiful, arriving at Gulmarg with panoramic views over the valleys. We were at the highest golf course in the world, snow was on the ground and we played in the snow for a while.

While in Srinagar waiting for the bus to be repaired, we had no choice but to laze

around the houseboats in an unplanned extended stay. We could take the Shikara

whenever we needed it. We sometimes went into town for a look around, and we found a place called “Solomon’s Bar” and listened to music, had a meal and relaxed.

We hired bikes and rode to the Shalimar Gardens; these are formal gardens in Srinagar laid out by the Moghuls in the 17th century.

We took it in faith that the bus would be repaired and we could eventually resume our journey, Rex had been gone for almost a week, and we had very little news of how things were progressing.

Seven days after breaking down, we heard on the grapevine that the parts had arrived from England and the bus would be repaired and be ready in a day or so. We left Srinagar at 7 am on the 25th May, in two Tata buses and retraced our steps over the mountains back to Jammu. We arrived at the hotel in Jammu at about 6.30 and settled into the bar for a few beers then went out and found a place for dinner.

Breakfast was between 9.30 & 11.30, and after breakfast I walked down town with Mark, Jane & Pat. We somehow ended up in a grotty little pub for a few beers. We then had dinner at a Chinese restaurant, “The Premier Restaurant” along with Bev and Sheila.

A few people were dissatisfied with the condition of the bus and called a passengers meeting. We held it in the lobby of the hotel. Someone had written a letter of complaint to Capricorn and wanted to send it to them in London. I was reluctant to sign it and didn’t, later on, after more discussion, I ended up signing it, a decision I regret. I felt that given the nature of the trip and the conditions under which we travelled, things were bound to go wrong, and were only to be expected.

We had a free day in Jammu. After breakfast, I went for a walk around the town for a few hours. I was hot and buggered and went back to the hotel for a rest until 7.30. Across the road there was a museum, built in the nineteenth century for Raja Amar Singh, by a French architect on the lines of a French Chateau. It has many exhibits including a golden throne weighing 120 kg, a library of 25,000 antique books and many rare art collections.

The bus arrived that night at about midnight. It was great to see Rex; he had achieved a mighty result under unbelievably difficult circumstances.

Saturday 28th May we resumed our journey. We left Jammu at 11am and re-joined the Grand Trunk Road to Amritsar and arrived at about 6.15pm. Some of us were dropped off at a hotel where there was not enough room for us, so twenty five of us caught trishaws to the Airline Hotel.

After settling in, we then caught trishaws out to the Golden Temple which was one of the most memorable sights on the overland trip. The Golden Temple was planned in 1597 by Ram Das, the fourth Guru of the Sikh religion as a central place for worship for its followers. The Akal Takht, or Immortal Throne, is the supreme seat of Sikh religious authority. The Granth Sahib the sacred book of the Sikhs lies in the sanctuary under a canopy.

Afterwards we went to the Kwality restaurant for dinner and ice creams. We had an early night for an early start to the India/Pakistan Border.

We arrived at Indian Customs at the Atari road border at 8.30am; it was a long hot wait for the Indian customs officials to clear us.

PAKISTAN

We arrived at Wagah Pakistani customs and it was another long hot wait. After enduring the heat and frustrations of the border crossing, we came across an artesian bore and had a cooling swim. We left at 3.30pm for the short drive to Lahore and arrived at the Country Hotel at about 4pm.

After we settled into our Hotel, we walked up to the Intercontinental Hotel and gorged ourselves on ice cream. Lahore is a sprawling, bustling city with non-stop traffic, dust and heat. Lahore’s streets are jammed with motorised rickshaws and mini-buses which compete for road space with the carts pulled by water buffalo and huge humped Brahman bulls.

There were reports of a coup d’etat after our arrival in Pakistan. We were advised not to leave the hotel area for security reasons, but Mark and I walked down to the town. We could see there was a lot of military activity with Jeeps full of soldiers, armed with machine guns mounted on the back. As we walked, we found a lot of hostility towards us, I in particular had stones thrown at me, and as it was getting quite dangerous we returned to the hotel. There were discussions on whether it was safe to continue our journey, but we thought that it would be best to press on and keep a low profile.

While getting ready to depart for Rawalpindi, Herman & Heinz found that they had had their passports stolen from their room during the night. While we waited for the police to arrive; most of us went back to the Intercontinental for ice creams. By 3.30 we were on our way to Rawalpindi to see the Australian Embassy in Islamabad regarding the stolen passports, an 11 Kilometre detour, as nothing could be done at short notice, we had to continue on without Herman & Heinz, and we never saw them again.

Continuing along Kipling’s Grand Trunk Road, teeming with trucks, overcrowded buses, and motorised trishaws, we arrived at Rawalpindi at about 8pm. We waited at a filthy restaurant for dinner until about midnight when Gaye stormed out of the kitchen warning us not to eat there as the kitchen was over run with cockroaches and vermin. At the Hotel Pakland International, it was not much better. No hot water for a shower, we went to bed hungry and dirty. With nothing much of interest at Rawalpindi, we left for Peshawar at about 3.30 travelling through very hilly and barren countryside and arrived at Peshawar at about 6.30.

I was feeling very sick with some sort of virus. Mark insisted that I have something to eat and I walked with him and Lana to the town centre. The feeling in the street was very tense and seemed thick with trouble, people were throwing stones, not at me this time, but at the police. Street lights and shop windows were broken. We watched as the Police bashed and whipped a local with their batons for no apparent reason and carted him of in a paddy wagon.

We found a restaurant, but I didn’t feel like eating, I could see that Mark was concerned about me, and after a while he took me back to the hotel. I remember little after that.

The next morning we left early at 7.30 so as to beat the Pennworld tour bus that had been shadowing us for the past few days, as we knew there would be a queue at the border and we wanted to get there before them so as not to be held up for too long.

Stopping briefly at Landi Kotal, at 1,072 metres above sea level it is the highest point on the route across the mountains to the Khyber Pass and the Afghan border is just five kilometres further west. Landi Kotal was the westernmost part of the Khyber held by the British during their rule of the subcontinent where a fort had been garrisoned by the Khyber Rifles; its prime role was to guard the Khyber Pass.

I was looking forward to going through the historic Khyber Pass, so many stories; so many legends have been told of this historic route. The road was crowded with

colourfully painted lorries laden with all sorts of goods, buses packed to overflowing, while a crowd of passengers travelled on the roof seemingly happy to travel with the luggage on the roof.

Through the Khyber Pass the armies of Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, Darius of Persia and many other rulers with armies have passed. These days, horsemen with hand made rifles and ammunition belts slung over their shoulders move at will throughout the area with their own rule of law.

AFGHANISTAN

At the border at Torkham we had about a two hour wait for customs clearance and bribery payments before we were on our way to Kabul.

Crossing into Afghanistan, we changed from left hand traffic to right hand traffic (RHD to LHD). The road followed the Kabul River through the Kabul Gorge, a much steeper climb and much narrower than the Khyber Pass, the road clings to mountain sides and passes through tunnels, climbing steeply.

The scenery was even more impressive than that in the Khyber Pass.

We arrived in Kabul at 7.00 pm.

Kabul has been the centre of ancient caravan routes for centuries, surrounded by the snow capped Hindu Kush. The atmosphere of Kabul with its fur shops,

camels and donkeys, Afghan women covered from head to foot in the traditional blue chador was an introduction to what we would see from now on through Afghanistan.

Some of us stayed at the Mustafa Hotel and I shared a room with Peter Yorke at the Sina Hotel.

The Mustafa Hotel was one of the overlands’ best known hotels. Situated right next to Chicken Street it was always full of Hippies and overlanders heading East or West.

We explored the renowned Chicken Street and explored the many alleyways and side streets. In the morning I had breakfast again at the Mustafa Hotel with Gaye and Jane then explored more of Kabul. We went looking for a

leather coat and started our haggling with the shopkeepers, starting at 3,200 Afs and telling them “too bloody much” eventually bringing the price down to 1,800 Afs, all good fun, I think Gaye ended up buying that leather and fur coat.

We found a “Supermarket” that sold goods that we hadn’t seen for what it seems like a long time, some of us bought items like thermos flasks, and other luxuries. I spied a tin of canned fruit, with strawberries and other delicious fruits on the label. I took it back to the hotel and put it in the fridge to enjoy later.

A group of us hailed a taxi to take us to the Marco Polo Restaurant. We bargained for what seemed a long time, and we all piled into the taxi, just to travel a few yards down the road. We had arrived at the restaurant where the heavy taxi fare had to be paid and we went upstairs for our meal feeling a little wiser and a lot poorer.

That evening, we had a room party, everyone brought food. We really enjoyed the wonderful food we had found, pineapples, peaches, biscuits and coffee, it doesn’t sound like much, but it was so good. The tinned fruit I had brought with so much anticipation turned out to be nothing more than the cheapest cuts of fruit and nothing like what was on the label of the tin. I was so disappointed especially as I had it sitting getting chilled in the hotel fridge for hours.

Friday the 3rd June, we were woken with an earth tremor. It lasted quite some time and the walls were shaking and the room light was swinging from the ceiling. Gaye, Jane and I started to walk to the noon day gun to be there in time to see it being fired. It was too far, so we hailed a taxi, only to find when we arrived that the gun hadn’t been fired for years, but the panoramic views over Kabul were worth the taxi fare.

After returning to Kabul in the afternoon, Rex and Bill were going to have a look at the brakes on the bus. I went along to help. The bus was parked behind an old mud brick shop; we somehow jacked up the front of the bus and dismantled the brakes. I had never seen a set up anything like this and couldn’t offer any help other than to hand the tools to Rex and Bill. During our work, we had to ask the person who had the shop next to where we were working and from where we were getting the power for the lead light, for some help with the intermittent power supply. He was annoyed with us for interrupting his prayers.

We managed to restore brake pressure and we finished work at about 9.30. I went back to the hotel for a shower, and as Bill had promised me a few beers for my help, I went back to the bar at the Mustapha. I particularly remember those few beers and enjoyed them, and then I went to bed at about midnight.

The next day, Saturday 4th June we left Kabul at 9.00 am, I was feeling very sick with stomach pains and after a stop at Ghazni we arrived at the Kandahar Mayfair Hotel at about 6.30pm. The countryside around Kandahar is very flat and semi-desert. The road from Kabul to Kandahar is an American built tarmac road, and was in good condition.

During my time in Afghanistan, I was fortunate enough to read a book by James A. Michener, his Pulitzer Prize winner “Caravans” a story of an American girl who disappears in Afghanistan and the diplomatic attache who was assigned to pursue her across the deserts of Afghanistan. It brought the caravanserais and the lifestyles of the nomadic Kochi peoples to life. I read it in the bus travelling through the countryside it was describing to me.

I had the feeling of how lucky I was to be living this experience. I really pinched myself, as if to confirm the reality of where I was and that I was on this incredible journey.

I was so sick; I did not want to see anything of Kandahar and just wanted to sleep. Mark roused me and told me that there was a hotel just across the road that had a swimming pool and I would feel a lot better if I had a swim. I staggered across the road with him in anticipation of a healing swim, but alas, when we got there, all that was in the swimming pool was a frog!

I went back to the hotel. The showers and toilets were abysmal, just a disgusting mix of sewer and open drains. I had a shower anyway and went to bed. Gaye and Jane came and looked after me. I could see they were worried and kept me warm and wrapped up. I will never forget the amount of flies in the room and on my bed sheets. They were thick, and I didn’t care! I was so sick, even delirious at that stage. I am sure that I would have been a hospital case if Gaye, Jane and Mark hadn’t looked after me so well.

We left Kandahar at 8am and the countryside changed to a stony desert and along the way we saw Kochi nomads with their camels, goats and sheep, and their black tents pitched in the distance.

The road from Kandahar to Herat is a Russian built concrete road. This road traverses the Dasht-e-Margo, the Desert of Death. At about half way to Herat there was a huge Russian built hotel, completely deserted, but fully equipped. It was there to house Russian technicians who built the road, then handed over to the Afghan government. Were the Russians planning something else? We had a look around then left.

We arrived at Herat at about 7.30pm and had another room party.

Herat is the largest city in the Western Region of Afghanistan. The city is as old as mankind. It pre-dates Alexander the Great by centuries and has been invaded and conquered by every power to sweep through Asia. Following Alexander were the Ghaznavids, Ghorids, Timurids, the Mongolian Hordes, the Moghuls of India and Central Asia. The British tried to take the city through force of arms. The Czars of Russia attempted to steal it away through both armed force and intrigue.

The next morning, Mark and I walked to see the Minarets. Built in the late 1400’s, today only six of the original twelve minarets remain from Queen Gawher Shad’s Madrassa. The dusty streets of Herat were busy with camel trains and donkeys and the colourful horse drawn carriages that provide a cheap taxi service.

Dominating the scene in Herat was the Citadel. This fort was originally built by

Alexander the Great in the 4th Century B.C. Although it has suffered repeated attacks over the centuries, it is still standing.

I was feeling a little better and walked down the street for some of the beautiful Nan bread, straight from the Tandoori oven, so nice to eat while still hot.

IRAN

Tuesday 7th June, we left for the Afghan border at Islam Qala at 8am. The Afghan Customs searched every one of our bags; we were not too happy, standing around in the heat and the dust. It took four hours to get us through, and on the Iranian side at Taybad, we expected worse, but it wasn’t so bad and we were happy to arrive at the Meshed campsite, where we found the facilities

better than we had experienced before. There was a swimming pool and

permanent tents.

Mark and I decided to go into the city, so we hitched a ride on the back of a 50cc Peugeot bike, riding triple. It was a scary and hairy ride through the teeming traffic, and we survived to eat at a restaurant with exotic dishes, where we probably ate goat or something similar.

We tried to see the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza (P.B.U.H.), but as we got close, the pilgrims became hostile and started throwing stones at us. It wasn’t exactly a welcoming party and we backed off. It was still a magnificent sight at night, so brightly lit and so much was what I expected to see in the Islamic world and the Middle East.

The Holy Shrine of Imam Reza is one of the most Holy sites of Islam. Imam Reza is the eighth grandson of the Prophet Mohammed, and as we found out, the shrine and tomb are off limits to tourists. The complex of Imam Reza’s Holy Shrine in the Holy city of Mashhad is one of the most significant Islamic-scientific centres in the world.

We hitched a ride back to the campsite.

After a late start at 9.00 am, we headed across green rolling hills rich in trees and fertile cultivated ground; we arrived in Gorgan at 7.00 pm. After a dinner of kebabs we went looking for a beer with not much luck, returning to our hotel of which I remember nothing, except that my diary note mentions that I sat and waited for the one and only shower to become vacant.

Gorgan was nothing more that an overnight stopover and were on the move in the morning by 6.00 am.

We travelled over the Elburz Mountains that fringe the north of Iran to Tehran. There was discussion on whether we should take a detour to the Caspian Sea, but one of our travellers suggested that it was not worth the time. He had been there before and there was nothing to see… His opinion, but nobody seemed interested and we continued on to Tehran.

We arrived at about 4.30, just in time to see the Crown Jewels on display at the Iranian National Bank, The Bank Melli Iran, now known as the Bank Markazi

Jomhouri Iran.

The Crown Jewels, now known as the National Jewels of Iran, is a

collection of some of the most valuable jewels of the world, collected (stolen) over centuries. The collection is of world standard and quite easily out shines the Crown Jewels of England.

The treasury is located in an underground vault at the Iran Central Bank; entry to this treasury is under very strict security control. Once inside, there are display cases containing many pieces encrusted with jewels, some dating from the Safavid dynasty. There are numerous ornaments such as brooches, daggers, belt buckles and ceremonial regalia all decorated with gems, and the most famous of all, The Peacock Throne, estimated to be worth over thirty million dollars in 1973. These jewels formed part of the treasury reserves for bank note issues,

and later became collateral for Government liabilities to the Bank.

Afterwards, we went to a local restaurant, The White Cap, for dinner, then to an English style Pub for a few pints. Somehow, Kaye and I got lost going home and had to catch a Taxi arriving back at the Asia Hotel at 1.30 am.

I woke late, and walked with Mark to the National Museum of Iran, which houses one of the world’s finest collections of Achaemenian, Sassanian and Islamic art, including objects dating back to 4000 B.C., we then went to the Golestan palace, set in formal gardens, it is used for State occasions. It contains a collection of carpets and 19th century art. After a hot and thirsty walk, we found a bar at the Park Hotel, then on to Ray’s Pizza place for spaghetti bolognese.

Pat and I received a lift from some one in a private car to take us to the Shahyad Tower. Built in 1971 by the then current Shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi in commemoration of the 2500 years of continuous rule by the Shahs of Persia this

"Gateway into Iran" was named the Shahyad Tower, meaning "Kings' Memorial", but was renamed the Azadi (Freedom) Tower after the “Glorious Islamic Revolution of Iran and the Imposed war” (the Iranian Revolution and the Iran – Iraq war) of 1979.

Because of it’s sensitive close proximity to the Airport and military facilities, we were not allowed to take our cameras up into the tower, and had to leave them in lockers at the base. The view from the top was a fantastic view of Tehran, and it overlooked the Airport and Air Force Base.

After a long, long walk to look for another restaurant with no luck, we hitch hiked back to Rays Pizza place for dinner.

We obviously trusted the Iranians by hitchhiking, their friendliness and hospitality was still evident when I returned with Becky to Iran 33 years later in 2010.

Saturday 11th June, we left Teheran after delays at 9.00 am, Rex had rushed Peter Yorke to hospital in a taxi with food poisoning and a fever. We had to leave Pete behind. Peter was to stay in a Tehran hospital with drips in his arm for five days. He eventually caught up with us after having to fly to Baghdad.

Driving south at the edge of the Dasht-e-Kavir, the Great Salt Desert, to Isfahan, we stopped at Qom for a bite to eat. Together with Meshed, Qom ranks one of the holiest cities in Iran, non Moslem visitors must be very careful.

My memory is vauge, but I think it was here that Rex and I considered going for a ride on a camel, somehow, it never happened, and I felt relieved.

We arrived at Isfahan at 7.30, staying at the Jahan Hotel, Charbagh.

Isfahan was a mail collection point, and as we stood around collecting our mail on the street, I was distracted and I had my camera snatched. It was quick and I saw the thief run around the corner. I gave chase, but lost him in the crowded bazaars. I was most upset, as I planned to change the film in the camera after having taken all the available 36 exposures and they were still in the camera. It was so upsetting because I had on that roll of film, all of Afghanistan, Mashed and Teheran, all lost forever. And also no prospect of taking anymore photos for the rest of the journey.

Anyway, we went looking for a place to eat, but ended up having a dinner of Kebabs back at the Hotel.

The next morning I went to the police to report the theft of my camera. I visited three police stations before I could see someone to help me, as it turns out, there was nothing I could do except look into the second hand shops to see if it was for sale.

The Jahan Hotel was an older style hotel with a full length verandah at the front. Our rooms opened up onto this verandah so we had a common view overlooking the Chahrbagh. Chahrbagh Street was built in 1596. Along the street are four rows of plane and sycamore trees and is one of the most beautiful and famous shopping streets of Isfahan.

After dinner at a local restaurant, Gaye, Jane and others played cards untill 4.30 am on the balcony.

Considering the late night, I woke early at 9.30.

Isfahan is one of the most beautiful cities of the world, known as “Half the world”. We explored this interesting city, the Shah Abbas as we knew it, or more correctly, the Maidan-e Shah (or Maidan-e Naghas-e Jahan) is a spacious square in the centre of the city and is said to be one of the world’s largest. On the north side is the Ghaissariyeh Bazaar, on the south is Masjid-e Shah (Shah Mosque), on the east side is the Masjid-e Sheik Lutfollah and on the west is the Ali Qupu palace. Inside the Sheik Lutfollah Mosque one of the world most wonderful caligrahies can be seen. But of course, being uncouth and infidel Aussies, Mark and I found that the echo effect inside the mosque was perfect for singing rock songs that had the Mullahs very excited!

Later that afternoon, sitting on the balcony of the hotel with Gaye and Jane, we noticed some activity on the street below. Police cars drove slowly down Chahrbagh with anouncements from the on-board speakers. The street seemed to be cleared for some reason. Soon after, a convoy of Cadilacs and possibly Secret Service cars escorted a Rolls Royce and it pulled up opposite us where the Bazaar had been cleared for someone who was obviously a very important Sheik. He looked resplendent in expensive flowing robes, and surrounded by body guards.

That night we found some very hard to find booze. We bought a selection of cheeses and had a cheese and wine night in Robert’s room. We behaved ourslves and we wound it up at 1.30am.

Gaye and Jane had previously talked about producing a “News Letter” from the early days of the trip, and as the subsequent edition of the Daily Dysentry records;

 “Social Events & Diseases”

MESSERS COSBY, GREEN, ROBERTS,& WALSH REQUESTS THE PLEASURE

OF YOUR COMPANY... AT THE JAHAN HOTEL

Anybody who was anybody attended the festivities in room 73. The wine and cheese night gave guests a chance to sample the local products. An evening full of surprises and an experience never to be repeated! The wines ranged from rough red to very rough red, and from wild white/ mellow metho (Due to this fact smoking was banned) among the guests, was that delightful couple from Toronto Heights, Jill & Derek, who are seen regularly at these social parties. Derek dapperly dressed in his “Saks of Fifth Avenue” Jeans and paisley shirt looked very “Laid back” as he sipped his rough red & Pepsi. While Jill, dressed in her very new blue creation from one of the more popular boutiques in Herat, seemed content playing with a dill pickle After being wined & dined elsewhere, Jenny & Don Allan, not wanting to be thought of a “nobody” made an appearance at this

social function, Jenny wore a stunning, long flowing, aqua blue, halter neck gown & topped it off with a “bouffont” (How’s your French???) hairstyle. Don, being one of the best dressed men about town chose to wear freshly pressed navy slacks and brown shirt, heavily decorated with box design (Hey! Are they on the Penn tour?!!). Also seen at this Gala Night were; Miss P. Connolly, Miss L. Stapelton, Miss S. Martin, Miss G. Ballantine, Miss J. Mills, Mr M. Payne, Mr P. Cartwright, Mr A. Blacker, Mr R. Carson.

The hosts who chose to dress “casually” for the occasion expressed how thrilled they were – The whole evening had been “One big piss-up!!!”

Hic!!!

Isfahan is famous for quality handicrafts. These skills have been passed down from generation to generation for centuries, the artists here are renowned masters for miniature paintings and metalwork. I was always sorry that I never purchased a miniature painting, something I did during my visit in 2010.

Isfahan was such a memorable place and I was reluctant to leave for Shiraz at 9.00 am the next morning. There was a lot yet for me to see on this journey, and I already had seen more than I had expected. On the road to Shiraz we left the Dasht-e-Kavir and drove through hills and mountain passes where we visited many important historical sites; Ruins dating from before the Achaemenian period and including the tomb of Cyrus the Great (559 - 530 B.C.) And importantly; Nagsh-e-Rustam at about 4 kilometres north of Persepolis is the site of the tombs of four Achemenian kings, Darius I (521 – 485 B.C. ) Xerxes I (485 – 465 B.C. ) Ataxerxes I ( 465 – 424 B.C. ) and Darius II (424 – 405 B.C. )

PERSEPOLIS

Darius I ( Daius the Great) built Persepolis in 518 B.C. Alexander the Great invaded Persia in 330 B.C. and destoyed the city, presumably in revenge for Darius destroying Athens and the Acropolis in 480 B.C.

Persepolis is the remnants of the first great age of Persia and of great historical significance. The detailed carvings, bas-reliefs and gigantic fluted columns remain as a silent reminder of one of the world’s greatest empires, of all the bare bones still standing in Persepolis, perhaps the most impressive is the elaborately sculptured grand staircase of the Apadana. Here in three distinct rows, we can see tribute being brought to the King of Kings by conquered peoples: Medes, Elamites, Parthians, Sogdians, Egyptians, and Bactrians; Aramenians, Babylonians, Scythians, Asyrians, and Thracians, Phonecians, Cappadocians, Lydians, Aracosians, and Indians, it seems that only the Australians had not yet been conquered!

We climbed the grand staircase leading up to the terrace, with the porch of Xexes at the top, with its colossal bas-reliefs of winged bulls, the carvings and columns of the palaces, and the remains of the treasury.

Leaving the impressive ruins of Persepolis behind us, we arrived at the Shiraz campsite at about 7.00 pm, on the 14th June. We played cards until 1.00 am.

It seems that I wasn’t too impressed with the place. I walked with Mark around some crowded bazaars with food stalls filthy with flies. Luckily there was a swimming pool at the campsite where we could relax and escape the chaos of the markets.

Gaye and Jane had talked about producing a “News Letter” from the early days of the trip, and it was distributed while sitting around the pool. The logistics of doing this was pretty much impossible, as there were no photo copy facilities en-route, and of course, no computer programs, no printing facilities that we are used to these days. Gaye was a graphic designer and “artistic”, her friend Jane was inspirational. As we sat around the pool, the First Edition was discussed. The 15 page “The Daily Dysentry” would be distributed to a record ( and captive) readership of 44, Dateline 10th June 1977, which dates it when we were in Isfahan. It was recorded in “The Daily Dysentry” that Rex was burnt by scalding water on the 15th June, as we filled up with fuel at a service station. It seems that printing deadlines were rather flexible!

June 16th, we left Shiraz at 5.00am, and drove through hills, small mountain passes, and stopped on the way to have a cooling swim in the Marun River.

It was stinking hot and we all stripped off and floated down stream and cooled off.

We detoured a little bit on the way, and turned off the road by way of Banar-e-Sharpur, where we saw the “Marsh Arabs” with their reed huts and particular way of life. As we approached Abadan, we could see oil wells with flames coming from them.

Abadan turned out to be a dirty industrial city, the oil centre of modern Iran and seemingly covered with a film of oil, and smelling like it. We arrived at 8.00pm. Later, I walked with Rex through the streets of Abadan looking for medical help, anything to heal his burns. I felt helpless as we couldn’t find First Aid. We managed to find a sort of chemist who gave us some help.

IRAQ

We left Abadan at 8.00 am with a one hour drive to Iranian customs. We had to wait three hours for clearance to exit Iran, then a drive through “no-man’s land” with no road, just desert tracks to the Iraqi Customs post.

It was always doubtful that we would be able to enter Iraq, and there was always the possibility that we could be turned back, we didn’t understand why or the consequences, but there was always the apprehensive feeling that we may not make it through.

After clearing Iraqi customs, we crossed the Shat al Arab waterway that led to the

Persian Gulf. This was a most historic place, the confluence of the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers, and here I was, at these places that I learned about in history lessons.

Further up river, we reached the town of Al Qurna where the legendary site of the Garden of Eden was supposed to be, and where “Adam’s tree” an old apple tree was still there. (It has since died.)

The sign at the gate says: "IN THIS HOLY SPOT

WHERE TIGRIS MEET EUPHRATES THIS HOLY

TREE OF OUR FATHER ADAM GREW

SYMBOLISING THE GARDEN OF EDEN ON EARTH ABRAHAM PRAYED HERE TWO

THOUSAND YEARS BC".

Eighteen hours after we left Abadan, we drove past our intended overnight stop at Al Kut and arrived at Baghdad, the city of 1001 tales from the Arabian Nights at about midnight.

Peter Yorke was there waiting for us at the hotel. He had survived the Teheran Hospital and it was great that he could join up with us again here in Baghdad.

The next morning, I walked to the shops with Sue and Heather where we met up with a couple of local guys and they shouted us lunch. They seemed OK, well dressed and polite. They told us they were Iraqi Air Force Pilots and they then asked the girls if they would like to see some of the sights around Baghdad. I think it was Heather who asked me to come along with them as chaperone, and this took me a little by surprise. We met up with the guys the following day and they took us out to the Arch of Ctesiphon, 32km south east from Baghdad.

They drove a 1960’s Chevrolet Bel-Air, at break neck speed through the desert. On the way back to Baghdad, the guys stopped at a roadside stall and bought a jam tin full of ice. I wondered, what are they doing? And then they produced a bottle of whisky and poured some over the ice. I was sitting in the back seat with Sue and Heather and I see that they were very concerned as to what going to happen to us.

The guys passed the jam tin and bottle of whisky to us in the back.

Sue suggested that I try to keep it from them, it wasn’t easy, I eventually had to pass it back to them and they started to get drunk, all while still driving at break neck speed along the desert road, Sue managed to get the tin and bottle back from them, and we kept it from them. They were getting upset with me. I was spoiling their plans to get friendlier with the girls.

They took us to “The Engineers Club” for beers; we sat outside in a beautiful garden setting and watched the sun set behind palm trees over the Tigris River. I kept a very nice beer glass as a souvenir.

We went to dinner for a unique experience at Abu Nowas Street for some Mazgouf, fish barbequed in front of log fire. We selected the fish live from tanks and they were cleaned and opened in a butterfly fashion and then left to cook in front of the fire.

We took the fish back to the hotel where the guys started to come on strong with the girls; it got a little nasty with Mark helping to eject the guys.

BABYLON

Babylon was one of the most important cities in the ancient world, located in Mesopotamia ( Iraq).

Today, nothing is left of Babylon but ruined mounds, which are next to the river Euphrates, about 85km south of Baghdad.

According to the Old Testament Book of Genesis, Babylon is the site of a tower reaching to the sky; the tower of Babel.

The famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world was not to be seen.

The ruins were evident enough of a great city, with some of the ancient bas-reliefs visible on the walls. The famous Ishtar Gate had been rebuilt and said to be as it was in Biblical times.

The following day we left Baghdad and drove through the desert of lava fields and stony desert towards Ar Rutba, Rutba Wells as the British knew it, in the middle of the Syrian Desert. There was no scenery, I sat on the floor of the bus playing cards to pass the time, it was stinking hot; all of us were stripped down to the bare essentials.

Mark mentioned to me that he had thoughts of wanting to go to Iceland, so I agreed, there and then!

I had always had the same desire but I never thought I would ever get the chance to go, something I would never had done on my own and something I would never have done unless Mark had asked me to go with him.

We eventually arrived at Rutba at 6.30, Mark and I walked down the street, found the toilets absolutely filthy, with excrement splattered up the walls and stinking in the heat, it was unbearable. Mark and I entertained the locals by singing songs to them, they really enjoyed it until the police arrived and put a stop to our show.

After we pitched our tents in the yard next to the hotel, we found our usual meal of Kebab and Nan. I had seen a cafe as we drove into town, and I suggested that we go back there to see what it was like. We found that they served Arak, a very potent alcoholic drink that is a traditional beverage in the Middle East. So we sat in the courtyard and enjoyed a very welcome drink after the heat of the desert trip.

We still had the rest of the Syrian Desert to cross, and a long way to go before we

reached Amman. So we were up at 4.30 am and on the road at 5.00 am and arriving at the Customs post at 5.30. After 2 ½ hours we were on our way again through the heat of the Syrian Desert. We followed an oil pipeline for most of the way and the next couple of hundred kilometres consisted of black lava rocks and sand. Near Mafraq, 80 km from Amman, we found some cold drinks at a little shop seemingly in the middle of nowhere; we were so hot and thirsty.

JORDAN

On Wednesday, 21st June, we arrived at Amman at 6.30, local time. We found

accommodation hard to find, and we eventually found room on the rooftop of The Taj Hotel. It was good, nice and cool with about fifteen of us together in the open and the others in the available rooms. We went to the nearby Philadelphia Hotel for a few beers and a meal of Pizza, Pepper Steak and stewed apples, the best meal for so long.

The next morning we left for Petra at 9.00 am, up into the hills with olive groves further on into the Jordanian desert, via The King’s Highway with the most beautiful desert scenery down into Wadi Majib just spectacular panoramic views, the wadi was stunning with desert colours of purples and oranges and reds, I wanted to stop for a while, but Bill wanted to keep on going. Climbing the other side of the wadi, the bus broke down again, this time overheating and a burst radiator hose the problem. We walked back down to the bottom of the wadi; a dry river bed that was 200 ft below sea level. The place I have written in my diary was called El Mazra, but it seems more likely to be at the bottom of Wadi Majib.

Now seemingly stranded again, Rex went back to Amman to find a replacement radiator hose. We camped by the side of the road under the stars at the bottom of the wadi, with just our sleeping bags for cover. The night sky was brilliantly lit with starlight. What I found amazing was the number of satellites passing overhead, but given the strategic nature of the area, it was not unexpected I suppose.

We woke at sunrise, finding everyone scattered about in amongst whatever rocks and bushes they could find. The sunrise was a beautiful experience in the desert valley. Rex saved the day again and with a replacement radiator hose we were soon on our way to Petra.

PETRA

We arrived at Petra at 3.30pm; and it is without a doubt Jordan’s most valuable treasure and greatest tourist attraction. It is a vast, unique city, carved into the sheer rock face by the Nabataeans, an industrious Arab people who settled here more than 2000 years ago, turning it into an important junction for the silk, spice and other trade routes that linked China, India and southern Arabia with Egypt,

Syria, Greece and Rome. Not only was this an important trading post along the Silk Road, this was the crossroads of the Frankincense Road.

Entrance to the city is through As-Siq, the Siq, a narrow gorge, over 1km in length, which is flanked on either side by soaring, 80m high cliffs. Just walking through the Siq is an experience in itself. Emerging from the Siq, you suddenly come face to face with Al-Khazneh, also known as The Treasury, it is the pride of Petra and the most beautiful monument there, with a massive facade, 30m wide and 43m high, carved out of the sheer, dusky pink rock-face and 35

dwarfing everything around it, and it is truly breathtaking.

We only had about three hours there and didn’t go as far as The Monastery, another three hours and a long, hard, steep climb away. As usual, Mark and I provided the entertainment and sang songs in the Roman style amphitheatre.

We had to make up some lost time, so we soon continued on to Aqaba where we

camped by the waters of the Gulf of Aqaba. We went to a restaurant where, in walked Omar Sharif, well, it was his acting double and he had doubled for him in the movie Lawrence of Arabia; there were photos of them both together on the walls of his restaurant.

Feeling a little home-sick, I woke late and went for a swim in the Gulf of Aqaba with lovely cool clear water. I felt refreshed and we left to return to Amman at midday travelling back via the Desert Highway with nothing but sand and rock as scenery.

We returned to our roof top accommodation at the Taj.

Outside in the street, there were trailer buses full of pilgrims on Hajj to Mecca; the parking area opposite the hotel was pretty much full and people sleeping anywhere they could find space, even in the doorway of our hotel.

EGYPT

Saturday 25th June, we left the Taj for the airport at 11.00 am to catch the Alia flight to Cairo.

Travel arrangements within Egypt were being handled by INTRATOUR, an independent tour company. They had arranged a special ten day itinerary for Capricorn.

We arrived Cairo at 3.00 pm; I bought a bottle of Vat 69 whiskey, duty free for $3.50. We settled into our hotel at the open air roof top bar and relaxed with a few beers.

We boarded a waiting bus for our drive to Alexandria, travelling up the Nile Delta arriving in Alexandria two hours later. After lunch, we went to the Montazah Palace, King Farouk’s palace that by now had been converted into a casino. President Anwar El Sadat later renovated the Palace as an official Presidential residence. Later we went to the beach and for a swim in the Mediterranean.

Looking round Alexandria we visited the catacombs, the pillar of Pompey and the ruins of the Roman amphitheatre. Lunch of grilled fish and salad was at a street side café overlooking the Mediterranean and costing a fortune!

CAIRO

We returned to Cairo via the desert road, we had our first glimpse of the pyramids across the desert and finally arrived at the Giza plateau and the Pyramids at 6.00pm. Within the space of a few decades between 2500 and 2465 B.C. the “Big Three” were created – the Pyramids of Cheops, Chephren and Mycerinus. We tried to climb the outside of Cheops, but chickened out, Mark and I climbed down to the feet of the Sphinx, and as usual, we got into trouble and were invited to leave. The Sphinx of Giza is the largest statue of Ancient Egypt. A lion’s body and a human head combine to form the figure of the Sphinx; this colossal figure is hewn from a rocky outcrop that was quarried to provide stone for building the pyramids.

Sunset at the Pyramids was memorable.

The next day we continued with more sightseeing around Cairo, visiting the Egyptian Museum and the Mummies Hall. The Egyptian Museum has on display the burial treasure of King Tutankhamen. This burial treasure is one of staggering wealth and unsurpassed beauty and was discovered almost intact. Tutankhamen’s funerary mask is the finest ever found and shows in its finish, workmanship of the highest order. It is made of beaten gold and inlaid with precious gemstones and coloured glass paste.

We later visited Old Cairo; known to the Egyptians as Masr al-Qadima and is often called Coptic Cairo as Old Cairo is the home of Cairo's Coptic Christian community. The Coptic Orthodox Church traces its founding to Saint Mark the Apostle in 42 A.D. Other sights in Old Cairo are the Hanging (suspended) Church, the seat of the Coptic Pope since 1047, and the synagogue of Ben Ezra, the oldest synagogue in Egypt. There has been a synagogue on this site since 606 B.C.

After lunch, I went with Pete Yorke to see his insurance representative to claim on his hospitalisation in Tehran, we ended up having a few beers with him at a beer garden right on the edge of the Nile.

The following day, we visited the pyramids again, this time we climbed the steep and narrow passage up into the burial chamber of Cheops.

We departed that afternoon on board the sleeper train for the overnight trip to Luxor. It was Gaye’s birthday and what a party we had, we took over the entire dining car, then back to Gaye and Jane’s cabin to continue with about eleven people crammed in to the tiny space until 1.00 am. Another piss-up!

LUXOR

We arrived at Luxor railway station at 6.00 am and were taken to the hotel by the horse drawn carriages that are found in Luxor. I had a hangover and had a sleep-in before we were taken to the temple cities of Karnak and Luxor at Thebes.

The next day we woke at 5am and we crossed the Nile by ferry to the west bank of the Thebes Necropolis to visit Valley of the Kings and the Mortuary Temple of Queen Hatshepsut “Deir el Bahari”, built in 1470 B.C., Medinet Habu the Temple of Ramesses III, the tomb of Seti I, the Mortuary Temple of Ramesses II, the Ramesseum and the Colossi of Memnon, which are a pair of colossal statues that once flanked the entrance of the largest Theban mortuary temple of Amenhotep III, and are the only remaining part of the Temple.

Afterwards we sailed down the Nile on a Felucca to a banana plantation and a swim in the Nile.

We returned to Cairo by overnight train, arriving at 10.00 am and transferred to our Hotel. Later that evening we went to the Sound and Light show at the Pyramids, then back to the Hotel at 10.30 for a few beers.

Today was a free day in Cairo, so I walked around the city with some of the others, we found some nice egg and humus sandwiches, we had seen some drink vendors with large brass samovars on their backs with a long spout, they poured the drink by leaning forward and filling the glass, we tried some and it was tasty.

Mark had very good idea, he saw a tram that was going to Merryland, and suggested we all go; it went all of 100 yards down the track! We caught the tram back and eventually we crossed the Nile by ferry and went up the Cairo Tower where it offered distant views of the pyramids and of Cairo.

This was our last day in Egypt; we had more egg and humus sandwiches, then left for the airport at 2.30 pm and landed back in Amman at about 8.00 pm and returned to the roof top of the Taj Hotel, then up to the Philadelphia for a few beers. The usual procedure.

ISRAEL

We were getting ready to go to Israel this morning, with not quite the start we expected, Hajji Pilgrims were sleeping under and around the bus. We cleared them away, and Bill tried to start the bus, but the batteries were flat. The batteries were located under the floor of the bus. I helped Bill get to them, and undoing them, he had the shits having to do this and tossed a spanner to the top of the dashboard of the bus, but it missed, and smashed the windscreen!

We eventually got underway without a windscreen, with the mood on the bus less than happy. People accused Bill of having a temper fit, but as I was the only other one on the bus at the time, this was not the fact. It was an accident, nothing more, but Bill was always accused of doing it in a rage. More problems were to come with the bus breaking down 50 km’s from the Jordanian border. A Mercedes air conditioned bus was hired to take us the rest of the way to the border. The border between Jordan and Israel was a frontier, as there was still hostility between them. The border crossing is the Allenby Bridge that crosses the Jordan River and connects Jordan with the West Bank in Israel. There was no vehicular traffic allowed to cross the bridge. We were dropped off by the bus on the Jordanian side and walked across to the Israeli controlled side. The original bridge built in 1918 was destroyed during the six day war and was replaced in 1968 with the current “temporary” bridge. The West Bank side of the bridge is considered a border entry point by Israel and is controlled by Israeli authorities exclusively. The Israeli Customs searched us very thoroughly. They opened every bag, checked every item, and even squeezed our tooth paste tubes to check the contents. After clearing customs, there were Mercedes long wheel base eight seater taxis available on the Israeli side and we were on our way to Jerusalem.

Because we were travelling in separate taxis, we had arranged with Rex to meet at the Damascus Gate. There was a little confusion, but we managed to assemble at the Damascus Gate and booked in to The Raghadan Youth Hostel just opposite. We then explored the Old City of Jerusalem with archways across its narrow cobbled streets, small shops full of everything from tourist souvenirs to spices piled high. We stopped at a delicatessen and had a beer. We had seen places like this before during our trip across the Middle East, but nothing like the variety, the quantities and cleanliness that we saw here; it was just a fresh welcoming experience.

I shared a room with Pete Yorke at the youth hostel. We had a window that overlooked the Old City walls, and I looked out the window at the sights. I don’t think I slept at all that night, and the nights that followed. This was probably the most exciting time for me and the destination that I most looked forward to. I returned nine years later with Becky, and it was just as exciting to be there again as was this first time.

Because we had to leave the bus behind in Jordan, our travel arrangements were left to our own. The group split up to follow their own arrangements, and in the morning I went with Anne, Marilyn, Pete Yorke, Carol, Jill and Derek to look for transport around Israel. This was something that I had never considered and was unprepared for, so I was appreciative that Anne and Marilyn were negotiating the arrangements. Mark, Rex, Gaye and Jane hired a Rental car for their transport.

There were a couple of times like this that I felt unprepared financially for unforseen and unexpected expenses. I took the expense suggestions from the

travel brochure to be a good guide, but here were expenses that I was totally unprepared for, as mentioned, there was no such thing as credit cards, and only the very rich could have an American Express card.

The next day we found a driver with an eight seater Mercedes taxi with whom we

negotiated a price to take us on tour. We drove to Bethlehem and on to Jericho, then down to the Dead Sea for a swim. It was a fabulous sensation to float, buoyed by the high salt content of the water, unable to stand, with the salt stinging the eyes if you got splashed. I noticed people rubbing the grey mud over their bodies and I wondered about this, but when Becky and I returned in 2010, on the Jordanian side, we found the healing properties of the mud were really miraculous. We returned to Jerusalem in time to walk through the Old City to the Holy Sepulchre, but I couldn’t go inside as I was still wearing my shorts and tee shirt from travelling to the Dead Sea. I had to be patient and wait for another day to enter when I was suitably dressed.

Anne, Marilyn, Pete, Derek, Jillian, Carol and I hired the driver that we had from

yesterday to take us to Galilee, stopping at Jacobs Well, then for a swim in the fresh water of Galilee. We had a lunch of St Peter’s fish, then to Nazareth and the Church of the Annunciation with its very modern stained glass windows, and then we went across to the Mediterranean coast at Netanya not far from Tel Aviv for a swim. Returning to Jerusalem, we passed burnt out tanks and other wreckage left from the 1967 war, just a reminder of how recent in history this was.

Saturday 9th July was our last day in Jerusalem, we walked and saw more of the sights of the Old City, and I never got sick of it, all interesting and still so much more to see. I had a dinner of a Ham and Cheese roll, the food here was so good and just like we get back at home. Back at the hotel that evening there was a party for Jill’s Birthday in their hotel room, another great room party.

Early the next morning we were on our way back to the border, we were quickly though the Israeli side, and after crossing the Allenby Bridge, we were at the Jordanian Customs at about 8.30 am. The Jordanians searched us thoroughly. They had a big bonfire, where they were burning anything that was Israeli, cigarettes, maps, books. Luckily, I was aware that this would be happening and posted all my souvenirs home, I had bought a bubble pipe for U.S. $19.00, and I packed this in pillows pinched from the hotel. It and the other items arrived home surprisingly in one piece. That bubble pipe is now a prized souvenir.

JORDAN

We caught a local bus back to Amman at about 4.00pm and returned to the roof top of The Taj. This was almost getting to be routine, but it was to be for the last time. The bus windscreen problem was solved. The Plaxton coach had indscreens that were split in the middle, and were identical to the ones in the back, enabling them to be swapped in such an event. So we continued the rest of the trip

with half the rear window missing.

We were supposed to leave for Syria this afternoon at 2.30, but by 3.00 for some reason it was decided to stay one more day. Anyway it seems Mark and I managed to get into trouble with the locals as usual. Jane had been pinched on her bottom by one of the local Arabs; we gave chase, but lost him in amongst the alleyways.

I was on the roof top of The Taj when Police armed with high powered rifles came and took over. I had no idea of what was about to happen. King Hussein and his daughter, Princess Alia passed by in an open car procession for her wedding. What an experience.

SYRIA

Tuesday 12th July, we eventually left Amman at 8.30am and after a couple of hours at the border, we crossed at Der’a and continued straight to the campsite in Damascus fairly late, missing some sights such as the Roman ruins of Jarash.

There was still a bit of tension between some of the passengers and the crew. We drove into the city the next day and arranged for Rex and Bill to ring London for Capricorn to arrange to send extra money. That done, Mark and I wandered around the streets of Damascus. A person selling peanuts, cashews and other nuts walked up to us with a wicker tray piled high with the different nuts nicely separated into neat piles. We didn’t want to buy any of his nuts and he got a little upset so he went for my nuts, I didn’t think that was a good trade off, and Mark started at him. I don’t remember which one of us did it, but the tray of nuts went skywards, and the nuts were scattered all over the road. We were taunting him and giving him a hard time when a huge guy approached us, he spoke to the peanut seller and I tried to explain, probably by graphic sign language, what he

had done to me and that he had grabbed me by my nuts, and I was not too pleased. Then the big guy took the peanut seller by the arm and we followed them down the road. We followed them until we came to what turned out to be a big Police compound and as the big guy walked through the gates, the guards saluted him!

Realising our situation and that we may be asked to stay for questioning over the

incident, we made a hurried retreat.

We had no idea where we were, as we had just followed blindly. As it was getting late, we tried to get a bus back to the campsite, but firstly, we didn’t know where we were, and secondly, we didn’t know exactly where the campsite was. This was a problem. We decided that the only thing we could do was to hitch hike back to the campsite. A guy driving a Renault 12 pulled up and offered to help, he was French and we think he worked at the French Embassy. He spoke little English, and we spoke no French, but we managed to tell him that we wanted to go back to the campsite that was on the road coming from Jordan. He was very helpful, and he drove back to his place to get a road map. He said he knew where we wanted to go and we started driving. As we drove, I could see that the landscape was nothing like what we had seen earlier and I was starting to get worried, I mentioned this to Mark and he was concerned as well. It was

when we saw the signpost to Beirut that we knew we were way off our route. We got him to stop. Eventually he got us back to our campsite.

Mark and I celebrated our return to the campsite in our usual disruptive style and

managed to upset a lot of people until late.

SYRIAN / TURKISH BORDER

The bus had a flat battery, after we had to push start it we headed towards the Syrian Turkish border. After Homs, we must have missed the turn off to Latakia, our intended overnight stop and continued up to Aleppo. We turned back toward the coast towards Latakia. We got lost a couple of times more, so we decided to give Latakia a miss, and headed for the border.

The scenery had changed dramatically, we had seen the last of the desert and we were amongst trees and greenery. It was late in the day and getting dark, we were climbing through forested hills when the bus overheated. Dave, Mark and I caught a ride on a local bus. It was full of locals with chooks and groceries, and we were more of a curiosity to them than they were to us. We stopped at a farm and got some water in some plastic bottles, and returned to the bus on the back of a truck, water splashing out from the top of the open bottles. By the time we reached the border, it was 11.30 and it was closed. We found the shop at the border was still open. It had cold beers and we drank all it had.

We pitched our tents amongst trees near the border and settled in for the night. I went for a walk and a cigarette when one of the border guards approached me and said “cigarette”, I thought at first that I wasn’t allowed to smoke in the area, but eventually I realised he wanted a cigarette! I said no, he said again “cigarette” I said no! He pulled out his gun and pointed it at me and said again “cigarette!”... I gave him a cigarette.

TURKEY

Friday, 15th July, we were through the border by 8.00 am and drove to Antakya, known as Antioch in ancient times. Entering Turkey, reached civilisation at last. In Antakya the only industry was making shoes, every shop was full of

shoes, and it was quite bizarre even the back street shops were full of shoes. After taking on supplies fresh local yoghurt, cheese and bread, we took off with eleven people short, some of those who were discontent with the tour left and caught a bus to Istanbul.

We followed the Turkish Mediterranean coast to Silifke, the ancient Seleucia of the Calycadnos. I had some Arak with me, and with others, decided to celebrate our return to civilisation. We arrived at the campsite on the beach at Silifke, had a steak for dinner finished the Arak and then an early night.

We had two days here relaxing on the beach, was very high and had to be careful. Some of us hired a little boat to take us out Crusader castle just off shore.

We left on Monday 18th June still following the Turkish coast towards Antalya with beautiful farmland scenery, and high cliffs overlooking the Mediterranean. We tried to find a campsite along the coast, but everything was booked out. We liked the look Side, a beautiful of beach with fine sand and clear shallow water, so we stopped for a swim anyway. Side was a Hellenistic and became a principal slave market during the Roman period with an amphitheatre that sat 25,000 spectators. We eventually arrived in Antalya at 10.30pm; everything was still booked out so we had no alternative but to sleep on the beach, It was a pleasant experience.

The next day we turned inland stopping for lunch at Burdur, I had a local type of Pastie filled with cheese, then continued through mountains to Denizli (Pammukale) the site of the Roman ruins and warm mineral springs. Here the thermal waters flowing over the plateau’s edge have formed a dazzling white cascade of basins ringed with stalactites over 100 meters in height. I had a piece of glass embedded in my foot for some time. I spent all afternoon in the pool and soaked in the warm mineral water glass seemed to have worked its way out by itself.

We pressed on to Kusadasi on the west coast of Turkey, arriving at the B.P. Mocamp at 3.30pm, and we went straight infor a swim. The water was not as warm as on the southern coast, but nice all the same. The facilities at The B.P Mocamp were better than we had experienced before, nice and clean with showers and hot water for once. There was a restaurant attached and we had a few nice meals there.

I spent the next morning swimming in the sea and after lunch, Mark, Rex and I went into town looking for parts for the bus, brake fluid I think.

We returned to the campsite for a few beers then took the coach back into town to an old castle, (a former pirate stronghold) which had been turned into a Disco. We had seen it earlier when we were in town, and thought it would be a

promising place to party, but when we got there, it was empty; there were plenty of other discos in town, but all empty. I thought that maybe the locals were a little shy?

We left the campsite early to Bergama, first was our visit to Ephesus, a well preserved Roman city where St Paul lived and wrote, and near the site of the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The magnificent ruins of Ephesus reflect the former might of this Ionian city that became the Roman capital of Asia. While we were there a lot of restoration work was being done. On the road to Bergama we were side swiped by a passing truck. We waited for two hours for the police to arrive, and then left after they failed to show up. We arrived at the Bergama campsite where there were old Roman ruins and warm underground spas, I spent hours there. The place had an Olympic size swimming pool but it was full of tadpoles, frogs and algae.

We stopped at the B.P. Mocamp at Cannakale after a stop off at ancient Troy, with nothing to see but a pile of rubble. After the impressive Persian and Roman ruins that we had already seen, this was nothing, for professional archaeologists it might be of interest. We went for a swim in the Bosporus, but it was cold compared to what we were used to.

The next day we had one of the most important sites to visit for us Aussies. We crossed the Dardanelles by ferry and drove the short distance to Gallipoli, and ANZAC Cove. With its very rugged roads and not being well signposted, visiting the ANZAC sites and to be where the ANZAC soldiers came ashore was a very moving experience, and it did not take too much imagination of how it must have been during WWI.

Sunday 24th June, three months after we left Australia we arrived in Istanbul and stayed at the B.P. Mocamp about 16 Kms out of the city.

Rex drove us into the city where we visited the Blue Mosque, and my diary reports that at the time it was in bad repair. We went to “The Pudding shop” for breakfast. It became famous later for its feature in the movie “Midnight Express” but it was in fact famous before that as a meeting place and message centre for overlanders. We walked around the Grand Bazaar, the largest in the world, thousands of people cramming in small alleyways of tiny shops and all sorts of goods on sale.

Dave and I went to a pub in the old area of Istanbul, Sultanahmet, for a drink; we hadn’t had a draught beer since we left Australia. We enjoyed ourselves very much. I remember Gaye coming up to us and berating us very seriously, “What are you doing? Here we are in Istanbul, with so much cultural heritage and you two are drinking bloody beer” She literally dragged us by the ear across the park to the Hagia Sophia. I remember that I was over awed by the size of the place, but, Gaye was right, here we were in such an important and historical place, and we failed to appreciate it. Maybe it was because we had already seen some of the most extraordinary sights in the world. For people travelling from Europe; Istanbul would be the furthest east as they would go. We were “Overlanders” a name that was given to us by travellers of our same age that were on European Contiki trips where Istanbul was the extent of their trip. We must have looked dirty and dishevelled as we had a battered and damaged bus, while to us, they looked so clean and neat with their polished air-conditioned coaches, and it must have been such a contrast.

Tuesday 26th July is the last entry into my diary, for a while. Mark, I, and a few others caught a bus into Istanbul where we went to the Bosphorus Line Pier at Eminonü to catch a ferry for a Bosphorus cruise. We couldn’t mistake where the ferry was, as the thick black smoke pouring from the funnels of the ferries led us exactly to where we were supposed to go. We caught the ferry and arrived at a fishing village, the mini Baltic Mehmet Korparal, Rumel Karvak was where we had the best fish meal that I ever had. I had great pleasure in taking Becky there on our trip in 2010.

After this, Mark and I went to the Caĝaloĝlu Hamam, a Turkish bath house constructed in 1741. These Turkish baths are listed as one of the 100 places to visit before you die, well, I thought we were about to die. We were pounded, pummelled and pulled into shape. We were trod on, twisted into shapes and positions that were not natural, and the experience left us sore but refreshed.

From Istanbul it was a fast journey across Europe to London, the major part of the trip was over, and all that was left was to get to London.

GREECE was a fleeting visit; we stopped at Thessaloniki for lunch. I had begun to get very home sick and I remember Kavala as being a place where I particularly missed my friends from home.

YUGOSLAVIA was a surprise as a beautiful country. In those days, it was a

communist country under Tito. It seemed to me as Switzerland was supposed to look, with beautiful villages and countryside, such a pity it was destroyed by war some years later, the Death of Yugoslavia was sad.

EUROPE. Travelling through Europe, Austria and Germany was so nice and we had so many beers, it was an introduction to what could be visited at a later time. Our last night was at Bruges and on the 7th August we crossed the English Channel from Calais to Ramsgate by Hovercraft.

LONDON. We arrived in London and that was it! We left the coach and I didn’t

know what to do. I had sort of arranged accommodation at the “The London Walkabout Club” but never confirmed it or followed it up, I wanted to stay with my new friends, and I didn’t want the trip to finish. Mark had suggested that we stay with Jenny and Don Allen as they had a room booked nearby in Earls Court; I remember that we slept on the floor of their room.

It was the end of the overland, I had visited the exact places where stories that I had read about in books had been played out so many thousands of years ago. It was extraordinary to know that I had visited the places where historical people walked and historic events occurred. We had visited the sites of four of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, The Pyramids of Giza, The Hanging Gardens of Babylon, The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, and the Lighthouse of Alexandria.

Mark and I went on to fulfil the ambition to travel to Iceland, and that is completely another adventure.

Thanks to Pete Yorke, Mark and Gaye for jogging my memory.

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Passenger list for Capricorn P21-1977

Name Nationality Profession Age

Donald Allen British Salesman 30

Jennifer Allen British Hairdresser 27

Gregory Aurish Australian Printer 23

Gaye Ballantine Australian Art Director 28

Herman Beike Australian Operator 43

Adrian Blacker British Engineer 27

Marilyn Carney Australian Teacher 32

Rex Carson Australian Courier 28

Peter Cartwright Australian Salesman 29

Beverly Casey Australian Data Processor 25

Bill Charlton British Driver 31

Patricia Connolly Australian Nurse 27

Robert Crosby British Banker 34

John Davies Australian Dentist 55

Mary Davies Australian Clerk 54

Kay Felton Australian Systems Analyst 33

Margaret Fitzgerald Australian Housewife 57

Barbara Goddard British Radiographer 25

Gerald Goddard British Doctor 29

Carol Grant Australian Teacher 25

Alan Green British Builder 28

Coleen Green Australian Teacher 24

David Green Australian Electrician 21

Frank Griffiths Australian Bank Manager (Retired) 65

Jean Griffiths Australian Housewife 64

Michelle Harrison Australian Student 21

Kristine Hodson Australian Typist 20

Rowena Jordan Australian Artist 22

Heinz Kneile Australian Brewer 39

Heather MacGugan Australian Medical Rec. Lib 25

Susan MacKenzie Australian Artist 21

Sheila Martin British Clerk 29

Bryanne Milbourne Australian Nurse 28

Jane Mills Australian Typist 23

Derek Moore Canadian Student 31

Gillian Moore Canadian Med. Secretary 31

Mark Payne Australian Accountant 26

Craig Roberts Australian Solicitor 26

Helen Roberts American Housewife 47

Anne Smallwood Australian Teacher 33

Lana Stapleton British Bookkeeper 26

John Walsh Australian Solicitor 26

Robyn Weir Australian Teacher 24

Peter Yorke Australian Fitter & Turner 20

Rex Carson 24/9/1949 – 1/1/2006

REUNIONS

*2nd & 3rd May 1997*

The 20th Anniversary Capricorn Overland reunion was held over the weekend of 2nd & 3rd May 1997. Starting with a cocktail party at Gaye and Rex’s home on Friday night, the following day there was a picnic on Clarke Island in the middle of Sydney Harbour with BBQ catering by Banks Marine.

Attending were.

Jane (Mills) & Roger Dunn, Gaye (Ballantine) & Rex Carson, Peter & Becky Cartwright, Mark Payne &Amanda Spouncer, Sue Akyut (Mackenzie) , Craig Roberts, John Walsh, Margaret Fitzgerald, Kaye (Felton) & Brian Halsted, Peter Yorke, Beverly Freeman (Casey) and Jean Griffiths.

*30th April 2006.*

Peter, Gaye, Mark, Margaret, Kaye.

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